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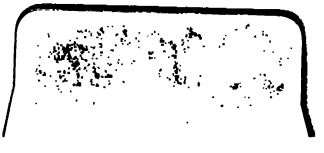

MANNA IN THE HOUSE:

OR,

DAILY EXPOSITIONS OF THE GOSPELS.

BY THE

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St. Mark.

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.

SECTION I.

(Chapter i. verses 1—11.)

ST. MARK, the author of this Gospel, was not, like Matthew, one of the twelve apostles: it is even questionable whether he was one of the Seventy. "There are diversities of operations," and there are diversities of callings; "but it is the same God which worketh all in all." "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom," by immediate calling and personal intercourse with Him, who is the Truth; to another is vouchsafed by the same Spirit the same effectual calling, and the same blessed teaching, but through human instrumentality: and from Peter, in his First Epistle, calling Mark "his son," it is most probable that he was converted to the faith by that apostle. In the Epistle to the Colossians he is designated as "sister's son to Barnabas;" and it was at the house of his mother, Mary, that many were gathered together in prayer on that night when Peter was miraculously delivered from prison by an angel. It is not necessary now to go through

the other few particulars of this evangelist's life, as we find them recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, because they will meet us in the regular course of the history: suffice it to say, that this Gospel is supposed to have been written under the superintendence, and with the revision of, Peter, and has undisputed claims to its position as one of the four Evangelists'. This Gospel gives no account of the birth of Jesus: passing by all the antecedent events, whether of the life of Jesus, or of John the Baptist, during the thirty years of their mutual privacy, till the time of their showing unto Israel, it commences at once with the public ministry of John, and the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan. There is a peculiarity in the expression used by St. Mark in the first verse: "The *beginning* of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And what is that beginning? It begins not with the annunciation of the angel to His virgin mother—it begins not with His birth, or infancy, or childhood; it goes far beyond this, and takes us back to Old Testament times, and the pages of the prophets. It is, indeed, only to Isaiah and Malachi that we are here directed, but the web of prophecy spreads through the whole volume: its unbroken thread extends from the Garden of Eden to the very close of the Old Testament canon; and we shall read with very imperfect vision, unless we read by the mutually reflective light of both Testaments. We may say of the pages of the Old Testament, as

the prophets said of John, that they are "the voice of one crying in the wilderness of olden time, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." They, too, were sent as the Lord's forerunners, to prepare both His way, and men's minds to receive Him. It was of Jesus that Moses in the Law, and David in his Psalms, and the prophets in their books, did speak; and when St. Mark here says, "The beginning of the gospel," he refers us to the time when these good tidings, however obscurely, were first revealed to man. "The beginning," indeed, was before all time. "The Word was in the beginning with God," "when there were no depths," "when there were no fountains,"—in the everlasting councils and love of the Triune Jehovah: but "*the beginning*" *to us* was when man sinned, and the Lord dimly assured the guilty pair that "the Seed of the Woman should bruise the serpent's head." "By man came death," but "by man came also the resurrection of the dead." St. Mark follows very much in the track of the preceding evangelist, though it is evident that they both wrote without connection with each other; and that, as St. Matthew's Gospel was intended chiefly for the instruction and comfort of his own countrymen, so St. Mark's was designed for circulation among the Gentile converts. He therefore studiously passes over that portion of the Baptist's ministry which had more immediate reference to the children of Abraham, and proceeds at once to that

which pointed to Him that was to come after him. John was an illustrious preacher of righteousness and of repentance; but the present evangelist passes by all his powerful and heart-searching appeals to those who flocked to his preaching, and dwells alone on that passage in which, discarding all thoughts of self, he speaks of Him, and Him only, who was mightier than he, and the sandals on whose feet he was not worthy to unfasten; declaring of his own humbler baptism, that it was, in itself indeed, valueless and ineffectual, except as a type and emblem of that mightier baptism of the Holy Ghost with which Jesus should baptize! What a pattern of humility and lowliness of spirit does the Baptist here show forth! and how truly in the spirit of that preacher who afterwards said, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus and Him crucified"! You must not, however, imagine that this humility is only intended for and recommended to ministers and preachers, or that it is exemplified only in the Baptist. Jesus Himself said, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart;" and the same mind which was in Christ Jesus should be in all that bear His name. Humility is lovely in all: it was lovely in John, it was more lovely in John's Master; and it is especially lovely in the young—"in honour preferring one another," "each one esteeming other better than himself." A supercilious self-sufficiency is both unlovely and unchristian; and we shall have drank but little of the temper which the Gospel

inculcates and produces, if any one of us "think of himself more highly than he ought to think."

SECTION II.

(Chapter i. verses 12—21.)

THE account of the temptation in the wilderness, as given by St. Mark, is of the briefest character, all summed up in two verses. But there is one incident recorded by this evangelist which throws a deeper gloom around this scene of awe than we find in the other Gospels. With them it is merely that "Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness;" but there were many parts of the country termed the wilderness, which yet was not absolutely a desert. John was in the wilderness, but his food there, though humble, sufficed for his wants; but the wilderness into which the Saviour was led was far different; and we now find that it was not only desolate and barren, producing nothing that could suffice for food, but, as St. Mark adds, that it was the haunt and abode of the wild beasts; that during those days of solitariness and trial, He was with the wild beasts alone. No doubt their natural fury was tamed—the prediction of the Psalmist was fulfilled: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the adder shalt Thou trample under feet. Because He hath set His love upon Me, therefore will I deliver Him."

It is a lesson of great consolation to all God's children in their trials and emergencies, that God can and doth deliver, as well as protect. The wild beasts of this world's wilderness have no power to hurt God's sons, any more than the hungry lions in their den at Babylon to hurt God's prophet. But we must remember that it was in no vainglorious seeking of danger, in no presumptuous reliance on the favour and protection of God, out of the way of duty, that either the Saviour or the prophet was unhurt. Jesus was led by the Spirit of God into this wilderness. He was influenced by an extraordinary impulse of the Spirit to withdraw Himself for a season from the haunts of men into the haunts of the wild beasts in the wilderness. God had especial work for Him to do there; and, in obedience to that suggestion of the Holy Spirit, He went there. I do not know all the purposes for which the Spirit led Him there; I presume not with unholy foot to intrude into that secret and ineffable communion of the incarnate Son with the Father in those forty days of prayer and fasting. Not an incident is recorded till those days were ended. No evangelist is permitted to lift the veil that shrouds those days of solitude, save that, even during that lengthened period, the tempter was allowed, by some secret and mysterious agency, to assail the solitary Saviour; though not till its close are we permitted to be the awe-struck witnesses, as it were, of that

conflict between the holy Jesus and His cruel but wily foe. We know, however, that one purpose of mercy was, that Jesus being tempted in all things like as we are, we might be assured that He had a tender compassion for our infirmities, and that we, seeing how that enemy of our salvation was foiled in the conflict with the Captain of our salvation, might rest confident that, fighting beneath His banner, and wielding the same weapons with which He repelled the foe, the meanest soldier of Jesus Christ will be more than conqueror through Him that loved him. No weapon formed or forged against him in the workshop of hell shall prosper. It is the declaration of Him who was Himself tempted in the wilderness: "No one shall pluck them out of my hand."

It was, too, in the way of duty, in the honest exercise of their lawful occupations, that these fishermen were found of Jesus, and were called of Him to be His followers and disciples. The promise that accompanied the invitation, that they should become "fishers of men," was perhaps little understood, and might have been little valued; but there was such a power which went with the words of Jesus, "Come ye after Me," that they straightway forsook their nets; and more than they, James and John also left their father and their gainful occupation to follow a despised Nazarene. It is a lesson full of instruction even to the lowliest,—nay, perhaps to those

especially does it speak in accents of tenderest condescension; and it tells them that the Saviour looks upon their humble toil with approval and interest; that many and many a time, when engaged in their daily work, whether along the upturned furrow, or at the dyke's side, the eye of Jesus is upon them in love, and the Spirit of Jesus may call unto them, as to these lowly fishermen, while mending their nets, "Come ye after Me." The call, indeed, is virtually made to every one,—it is the invitation of the gospel,—it is the message sent from God, "Come." "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come; and let him that is athirst, come." And, oh! "let him that heareth" the call, say "Come!" May you and I, and all that hear these gracious words proceeding from the lips of everlasting love, answer "Come!" "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

SECTION III.

(Chapter i. verses 21—36.)

I HAVE read this portion of the chapter at greater length, because it takes in the proceedings of a whole day; and it is not often that we have the occupations and engagements of one of the days of Jesus so distinctly marked as in this portion of the first chapter of St. Mark's Gospel; and what renders it more interesting is, that the *day here recorded* with such minuteness is the

Sabbath-day; and one loves to trace how He who avowed Himself Lord of the Sabbath, spent that holy day. It has been a constant question among the followers of Jesus, what the fitting duties and occupations of the Sabbath are. I am not speaking now of the avowed violators of the day, nor of those who, though in their own persons they may pay some respect to its observance, yet in the sight of God are as much desecrators of it, by compelling others to violate it. I am alluding only to those who profess to treat the question of Sabbath observances with some degree of respect, and who may be really sincere in their desire to know in what its privileges, its duties, and its engagements, consist. Some, indeed, look upon it as a day of literal rest and absence from labour; some consider a portion devoted to God, and a portion to themselves, to society, and to pleasure, as a fair division of the day; and some look upon every moment abstracted from worship and prayer and religious reading as sacrilege and profanation. It is very difficult to lay down any rule for the observance of the Sabbath, and, I might add, unnecessary also; for, I believe, that when the root of the matter is in the heart of a man, that man's own feelings, and his own sense of enjoyment and privilege, will be the best guide to its use, and the best preservative against its abuse, and that, in seeking and serving God, he *will be seeking* and serving pleasure:—

"Lord! in my view let both united be,
I live to pleasure while I live to Thee!"

The scene of this Sabbath-day is laid in Capernaum, the usual abode of our Lord while resident in Galilee. And "straightway on the Sabbath-day He entered into the synagogue, and taught;" that is, at the earliest hour on which the synagogue was opened for public worship and instruction; and we must remember that there were three services in every synagogue on the Sabbath-day. He was there engaged in His blessed work of teaching and instruction, and while so occupied, a painful sight is presented to His view,—a man with an unclean spirit, interrupting with unseemly noise the sacred offices of the place. How he got there we know not; perhaps in some calm and quiet interval of his disorder he had wandered in, and seated himself unobserved among the worshippers; or, it may be that the Evil One led him there to disturb the holy solemnity of the scene. And I fear it is not so uncommon even in our own houses of prayer as we might imagine. Even among ourselves, one, and more than one, might be found with an unclean spirit, not literally and physically possessed as this poor man was, but still "led captive of the devil at his will," and "tied and bound with the chains of his sin." *We* may not be able to detect him, but the eye of God is on him; and happy for that man if that Eye is on

him for mercy, and the Lord bids the unclean and unholy spirit depart, so that

"He who came to scoff, remains to pray."

And "forthwith," when Jesus had left the synagogue, he entered into the house of Simon for rest and refreshment; but even there no rest awaited Jesus. Another object of human suffering solicits His compassion, and finds relief. He who rebuked the unclean spirit, equally rebuked the fever, and the cure in both cases was alike perfect and complete. The remainder of the day was no doubt passed in the appointed works of the day; and "at even, when the sun did set," and the Sabbath had closed, and it was lawful for the sick to be borne about, "they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed of devils," and, in fact, "the whole city was gathered together at the door;" and no doubt, as He healed them, He spoke words of peace and comfort alike suited to the case of each. And thus was this Sabbath passed: in devotion and prayer, in teaching and instruction, and in works of love and charity and benevolence. We may well imagine the blessed Jesus retiring to His rest at the close of such a day of exciting and wearying and exhausting labour, for He felt weariness as well as we; He knew what the aching limb, and the throbbing brow, and the jaded spirits were, as well as we. And yet, when the morning of the next day

dawned, it found Him not at His repose. No! "rising up a great while before day," He had gone forth and sought some solitary spot in which to pour out His soul in prayer. Oh! what a lesson is here for us! How are we taught to clench, as it were, and seal the precious lessons and privileges of the Sunday, by early prayer on the Monday, before we again mingle in the trials and allurements and occupations of such an ensnaring and absorbing world as ours! Alas! how far too often does it happen that, if peculiar engagements call us forth at an earlier hour than usual from our homes, or detain us to a later hour at night, prayer is the duty most generally laid aside and left unperformed! As we look at our Lord's practice recorded here, we may adopt His own words on another occasion, and say, "Go and do thou likewise."

SECTION IV.

(Chapter i. verse 36 to the end.)

THIS miracle of healing the leper is recorded in almost the same words both by St. Matthew and St. Mark. Both evangelists record the earnestness and adoration of this poor diseased one;—the one states he "worshipped" Jesus; the other, that he "knelt down before Him," both implying the same fact, that he thereby acknowledged Jesus as more than man, and paid to

Him the homage and reverence due to God alone. But St. Mark enlarges more on the charge given by Jesus to the man, that he should not make known the cure, and the apparent violation of the command by the man who had received such a mercy at the hand of God. I dare say you may have often felt, as I have felt, astonishment, and somewhat of pain, at what strikes one not simply as disobedience to a plain and positive command, but as an ungrateful return to the request of a benefactor in the very moment of his kindness. It will not do to say that it is from excess of gratitude—a gratitude that could not be restrained, but must gush forth in words. We must not justify wrong by ascribing it to a right and generous motive; it would be but miserable sophistry and defective morality to palliate our disobedience to a known command, by saying that we meant to do honour to him whose command we disobeyed. Disobedience is in itself the greatest dishonour; and whatever our motive or purpose may be, we have no right to decide for ourselves, whether we shall obey or disobey Him who has a right to command us. The man in the present case either disobeyed the command of Jesus, and was therefore guilty of dishonouring Him who had just before conferred so signal a benefit upon him, or he strictly abided by the injunction which Jesus gave him. Let us see, then, how the case stands.

The account, as here given, is apparently very

strongly in condemnation of the man; and it is this which has so painfully jarred on the feelings of many, that, almost in the very act of receiving mercy, he acted contrary to the wishes and injunctions of Him who had healed him. But, on closer inquiry, the words bear a very different meaning—far more natural, more in accordance with what we should expect under the circumstances, and assuredly in no degree derogatory to the gratitude or obedience of the man. It certainly could have been no purpose of our Lord, that the fact itself of healing should be concealed, for St. Matthew tells us it was performed in the presence of "great multitudes who followed Him;" and if the leper himself had held his tongue, there were many and many to blazon it abroad. But the law enjoined that the priest should pronounce the leper clean, before he could be presumed to be so, or return again to society; and Jesus therefore, not only in obedience to the law, but to put the proof of the cleansing beyond the cavil of enemy or disputer, hastens this man to the priest, for his fiat and declaration of the completeness of the cure. He enjoins him, therefore, not to loiter by the way—not to stop to tell to passers-by, or step aside to communicate the glad tidings to those in his own house, but, "Go thy way," and direct thy course to the priest, at once. It was something in the same spirit and meaning with which Elisha sent Gehazi to lay his staff on the Shunammite's child,—"Go thy

way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again;" or as Jesus Himself sent out His disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles;" "Into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not." And I think we are justified in believing that this leper fulfilled his Benefactor's injunction, and hastened onwards to the priest, as Jesus had directed; and when he went out from him, pronounced a cleansed and a healed man, and restored to the charities and affections of home and kindred, *then* burst forth the utterance of his pent-up gratitude, and he published in every quarter the great things the Lord had done for him, and how He had had mercy upon him.

I suspect, however, that in our own cases we are much more likely to sin by silence, than by publishing the Lord's dealings with ourselves. None, perhaps, even of ourselves, but have had mercies to record, of recovery from sickness, of healing to our bodies; and have we gratefully given God the praise? Have we rendered unto the Lord according to the great things done unto us? The physician who attended us is rewarded and thanked; the friends who inquired after us are thanked; the attendants who waited on and nursed us are thanked;—all are thanked: the kindness and service of all is remembered and thanked; and God, who alone blessed the means, —who alone gave skill to the physician, and kindness to the hearts of others,—God is thanked

the least, the last, or perhaps not at all; and this poor leper will rise up in judgment against such, and condemn them.

SECTION V.

(Chapter ii. verses 1—12.)

It was probably at Peter's house in Capernaum, which seems to have been Jesus' usual place of residence, that the scene recorded in this portion of the chapter occurred. I believe we may learn a very useful lesson from the conduct of our Saviour on this as on many other occasions. God had given Him a work to do, and He was evidently in earnest in that work. He was unwearied in His efforts to save souls. Wherever He found sinners (and where the spot that He would not find them ?), there He immediately and fervently set to work to win souls to Himself and to God. He never stopped to ask whether it were in season or out of season, whether it were according to rule or rubric, to Talmud or tradition, or even as the regulations of society might require. His errand on earth was to seek and to save that which was lost; and while there was one lost and perishing one, who might be sought, and found, and brought back into the fold, His meat and His drink was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and "it was not the will of His Father in heaven that one of His little ones should perish."

And I think that we are all of us, more or less, hampered and fettered in our doing good by the fear of man, the dread of ridicule, and a sort of apprehension that we are going out of our way to speak even a word in season to one who may need it. I am not speaking of ministers' work: of course, their duty is in season or out of season, here a little and there a little,—by all means, and by any means, to be ever scattering the seed of the word; and they have no doubt opportunities and privileges afforded them which are not so plentifully vouchsafed to the private Christian. But there is no being, however humble, no one, however limited in his sphere—no one, I would add, however young, for really a child is often in its simplicity a very powerful preacher,—there is, I say, no being that lives that may not do an immense amount of good to others, if he will but lay himself open to every opportunity as it arises. I do not say that we can, or ought, at this day, and in this country, to gather a crowd around our door, and preach the word to them, as Jesus did in Capernaum; but is there no one under the roof to whom a word of kind admonition, or encouragement, or reproof, may be spoken in season? and do not we often withhold that word? Is there no one met with, even in our daily walk, or daily engagements, to whom an opportunity of letting fall a word of striking import may present itself, and that opportunity is suffered to escape unheeded? In fact, it would be endless to enume-

rate all the ways and means of doing good to others, and thereby to our own souls, if we would only honestly lay ourselves out to seize them. The great hinderance with all, and especially with the young, is the dread of being laughed or sneered at. "What will the world, what will people say?" is a far more common question than, "What does God require of us—what does brotherly love require?" It was while Jesus was intent on this work of love to the souls of those who were thronging around the door and pressing into the house, that the striking and impressive spectacle of this poor paralytic was presented to His sight. Unable to bear their helpless burden through the crowd to Jesus, and yet not willing to lose the opportunity they so earnestly sought, they had recourse to a plan which both evinced their love to the poor cripple for whose sake they toiled, and their faith in the power and mercy of Him to whose compassion they were appealing. Ascending to the flat roof of the house, and opening the door, which communicated with the interior, by means of ropes or pulleys they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay, at the feet of Jesus, as He sat teaching the assembled crowds. What a sight was this! What an illustration does the conduct of these men afford of what love can prompt, and zeal can do! A thousand difficulties might have been started, but faith overcomes them all, and faith is rewarded by the Saviour's own touching address to the cripple,

"Son, thy sins be forgiven thee!" Yes! even that helpless, paralysed man was dear to God, and his Saviour addresses him by the endearing name of son. How often does man turn aside in loathing and disgust, or at least in indifference and disregard, from some poor Lazarus full of sores, and yet Jesus may not disdain to call him son, and those whom earthly friends first led to Jesus, angels may hereafter carry to Abraham's bosom. Man seeth not as God seeth, and man often despises what God highly esteems: "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

SECTION VI.

(Chapter ii. verses 13—23.)

THE truth which is more immediately elicited in this portion of Scripture, arising as it did out of the call of Matthew, and the subsequent invitation to eat meat at his house, is the extreme tenderness with which the Saviour adapts the requirements of the gospel to the cases and conditions of those who receive it. He does not compromise its strictness in order to render it more palatable to the majority; He does not neutralise its precepts by lowering them to meet the infirmities and prejudices of others; but, at the same time, while he would bind His yoke upon us, He tells us that it is an easy yoke, and while He lays His burden on our shoulders, He

has made it light by taking its heaviest portion on Himself. It was a blessed errand which our Lord here announces as that on which He came, "to call sinners to repentance." How true is that word of the apostle, that "God commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." And yet we might have thought, judging according to human estimate, that the *righteous* would have more attracted the compassion and love of the Saviour,—that, had He looked down from heaven, and seen a righteous world lying in misery and wretchedness, and had He seen, too, that there was no one to relieve, no one to have pity on them, with that overflowing tenderness that was in His heart, that He would have hastened to their rescue, and with His own right hand have gotten them deliverance. And so, no doubt, it would have been, had such a sight met His view; but it would not have been at such a price: it would not have cost so much to deliver from misery as from sin: it would not have needed the blood of Jesus to blot out wretchedness, as it did to blot out sin. But did such a sight meet His view? God is represented as looking down from heaven on this world of ours, to see if there were any that did understand and seek after God,—and what did He behold? what did He find? He beheld, indeed, a world in ruins, lying in wretchedness and suffering; but there was none righteous, no, not one; they were all gone aside, all together become filthy; there was not one that did good, no, not one. The errand,

therefore, of Jesus might well be to call sinners to repentance: there were none righteous to call, for all had sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and those who deemed themselves righteous, like the Pharisees of our Lord's time, were sinners above all. It was because the world was lying in misery and sin, because men were dead in trespasses and sins, that Jesus came to awaken them from the sleep of death; and it was because these guests at Levi's table were sinners, that Jesus did not disdain to sit at meat with them, but sought them out, if haply He might save some. And yet His purpose of mercy was misrepresented and vilified, His errand on earth misunderstood, and His good evil spoken of; and those who thus maligned and reviled Him more needed the healing art of the Physician of souls, than the acknowledged publicans and sinners at Levi's table. It is impossible to please or satisfy some people. The disciples of Jesus did not practise the same fasting as the disciples of John and the Pharisees; that is, the purposes and counsels of their Master did not require at present the same self-denial and the same austerities which the Baptist and his followers had practised, and which the Pharisees, in their self-righteousness, enjoined. Our Lord, in His reply, does not deny the value and importance of fasting, in its proper place. He would, indeed, caution us against setting an undue weight on a mere outward ceremony, unless followed up by an increase of inward grace and holiness;

and He justifies His own practice as regarded His disciples, by declaring that hereafter they would have to undergo greater hardships, and encounter heavier trials, and make far more self-denying sacrifices, than any disciple of a Pharisee or the Baptist; and that till that time came, as long as He was with them, as a Bridegroom, to give joy and brightness around, they might rejoice. In the world they should have tribulation; in Him, while with them, let them be glad. It is unwise to lay too heavy a burden on a back unaccustomed to bear it; and it is a valuable lesson which the Lord here teaches us, not to disgust or weary new converts by unnecessarily rigid or impracticable rules: "touch not," "taste not," "handle not;" go not here, go not there; do not this, abstain from that, but we should *build* up believers in their most holy faith, as a wise master builder, stone by stone, and story by story; or, with the apostle's tender caution, who at first fed his converts with milk, and not with meat, because they were not able to bear it. The new-born babe is not nourished with the diet of vigorous manhood.

SECTION VII.

(Chapter ii. verse 23 to the end.)

THERE are few passages of Scripture which have been so perverted, in practice at least, as

this declaration of our Lord, that the Sabbath was made for man. I say in practice, for when you come to argue with people on the observance of the Sabbath, the majority fully acknowledge the sanctity of the day, and the sin of violating it—only, in their own peculiar cases, there are reasons which seem, to themselves at least, quite sufficient to justify them in putting it aside, and preferring some other duty to it; and thus all act as if the Sabbath-day were appointed and given to man for his convenience alone; that, if it suited his purpose, he could keep it holy, and if it were his interest to employ it in other and secular pursuits, he could do so without sin, and with a clear conscience. Our Lord, no doubt, here says, "The Sabbath was made for man," but does He mean that it was left to man's choice to supersede or keep it holy, as he pleased? Just look for one moment at the institution of the Sabbath: when was it ordained, when was it made for man, and in what state was man when it was given to him, as one of God's best and especial blessings? It was ordained in the beginning; no sooner was the work of creation ended, and, as God's last and greatest work, man had been formed, than God instituted the Sabbath-day,—"in the time of man's innocency," ere sin had soiled, or sorrow marred, the smallest portion of that which God had pronounced good. It was, too, when man was especially honoured and blessed with personal communion with his

Creator, that the Sabbath was then appointed in commemoration of God's ceasing from His work, and assigned to man as a channel even of more intimate intercourse and holy union with God. Man had then no labour to rest from, no eating of his daily bread in the sweat of his brow, no wearying toil of six days, to crave and rejoice in the repose of the seventh. He had then no sin to carry in penitential sorrow to the throne of grace; no sufferings, no sickness, no death, to anticipate or dread. All was peace and purity; yet even in Paradise the Sabbath was an added blessing; even there was it made and given to man to heighten the enjoyment and enhance the bliss of Eden. And surely now, when man has lost his inheritance, and has gained only the curse of sorrow and of labour, when life has become a painful and a wearying struggle, when sin and temptation have entered the Lord's heritage, when the image of God has been blotted out, and corruption and pollution taken its place, when the love of God has been obliterated, and enmity rules in its stead,—surely, then, the Sabbath were a gift made especially for fallen and sorrowing man. Man was not made for the Sabbath;—man, with his infirmities and corruptions, could never have been intended to give dignity or holiness to the ordinance; but the Sabbath, with its quietude and peace, with its sanctity and purity, and its means of grace, was

made for the well-being and recovery of man. And to show its undying perpetuity, its still surviving beyond the reach of time, and the wreck of this world, it is expressly declared by the apostle, "There remaineth a Sabbath for the people of God," as if the Almighty could shadow forth the blessed rest of heaven under no figure so dear, so expressive, or so consolatory to the heart of man, as that of an earthly Sabbath, such as He designed an earthly Sabbath to be, before man, in his daring impieties, polluted it, or in his puny arrogance denied it. There is not an edict of the Almighty throughout the whole Bible so carefully guarded as the Sabbath-day, so hedged in by threatenings, so fenced round by promises, so palisaded, if we may use the metaphor, by every barrier that language can supply. It has been said, foolishly, if not wickedly, that the Jewish Sabbath was abrogated, and the Christian Sabbath never enacted. I deny both assertions;—the *day* of the Jewish Sabbath was *altered*, but the institution itself was never annulled,—it was left untouched; and why should that be re-enacted which was never abrogated? The Sabbath, as we have seen, was far antecedent to the days of Moses, far beyond the time of the patriarchs; it was coeval with creation, and under its image is represented the everlasting rest and Sabbath of the blessed in heaven. It is, then, with far more fervent thanksgiving and uplifting

of our hearts to God, and far deeper sense of the privilege bestowed in the gift, that we should receive our Lord's precious declaration, that

"THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN."

SECTION VIII.

(Chapter iii. verses 1—13.)

IN the close of the preceding chapter we had the Pharisees finding fault with Jesus because His disciples plucked some ears of corn on the Sabbath-day, to satisfytheir hunger. Jesus justified the act on the ground of its being a work of necessity, and gave utterance to that most comforting and precious declaration, that "the Sabbath was made for man." We here again find the same parties watching Him with eager malice, whether He would heal a man with a crippled hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath-day. It is strange how blind is the infatuation of malice and revenge! These Pharisees were most intent to catch the Saviour in an act of mercy and kindness on the Sabbath-day, and would immediately have charged it on Him as a crime; and yet they seem not to have been aware, or to have regarded the fact, that they were themselves all the time indulging in the most bitter feelings of malevolence against Jesus, and that, too, in the house of God, in the very place set apart for acknowledgment of sin, and supplication for mercy. At the very time

they had resorted to the house of God for mercy to themselves, they were guilty of the double sin of wishing to hinder the course of mercy to a suffering fellow-creature, and to lay a snare to entrap another to his ruin. Our Saviour's conduct and feelings on this occasion are very instructive. He was aware of the purpose with which the eyes of so many in that synagogue were intently gazing on Him; He knew the lurking malice which was in their hearts, and how eagerly they would take advantage of any act for which they might accuse Him, and render Him amenable to a court of justice. But was an act of mercy to a suffering creature to be passed by because of the malice of His enemies? was He to cease to do good because they would turn it into evil? It was for this purpose He had come into the world; it was this which had been predicted of Him, that He himself should heal our sicknesses and bear our infirmities. It was the very spot, too, for mercy, where the Lord loved especially to meet sorrow, and dry the mourner's tear. Where should the sufferer go for peace, and acquiescence in the Lord's will, but to the house of God? and Jesus would not thwart the longing hopes even of the meanest in His Father's house. He therefore appeals, in the first place, to their feelings, and bids the cripple stand forth before them all. It was as if He had said, "See this poor helpless cripple, unable to aid himself, incapable of earning his own subsistence, a burden

to himself, a sorrow to his family; he has come here on a day which tells of rest and peace to the wearied and worn, and do not your hearts melt with sympathy for his suffering lot?" One would have thought the appeal in itself irresistible; but He further appeals to their reason also, and bids them decide the question, whether it were lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil by withholding good? Their own prophet had answered the question, "And now, O man, what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to show mercy?" The appeal, however, to their feelings and their reason was alike unanswered: "they held their peace." Well might the meek and lowly Jesus look round about on them with anger. But, oh! how different the holy indignation of Jesus from that wrath of man which worketh not the righteousness of God! "Be ye angry, and sin not," says the apostle. There is an anger, therefore, which is unaccompanied by sin; but, mingled as our anger too often is with the infirmities and bitternesses of our nature, we cannot be too watchful over its first risings in our hearts. The best rule is that which our Saviour's own feelings on this occasion supply. He looked, indeed, on them with anger; but that anger was mingled with grief for the hardness of their hearts. He was indignant at the sin, though He still yearned over the sinner. And so let us be thus sensitively jealous over our own hearts. If we are stirred to anger by the

injustice or wrong of a brother, let it be mingled with sorrow for his sin and prayer for his restoration. One can hardly carry anger to a guilty extent, if we make a practice of mingling the name of him who has wronged us in our daily prayers for God's mutual forgiveness on him and ourselves. There is, however, a time coming when the wrath of Jesus against His enemies will no longer be blended with pity or compassion; when even the meek and forgiving Saviour will say, "As for these mine enemies, that would not that I should rule over them, bring them hither, and slay them before mine eyes." "Kiss then the Son," says the Psalmist, "lest ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little."

SECTION IX.

(Chapter iii. verse 13 to the end.)

We have in the first portion of to-night's Scripture the appointment or ordination of the twelve apostles to be the constant followers of our Lord, to be with Him continually, and to go forth as He should think fit to send them on His errands of love and mercy, to preach the word, to heal sicknesses, and cast out devils. The call of some of them has been previously mentioned. Simon Peter is the first named in this list, not because he was the first called, for his brother Andrew had been a disciple of the Baptist, and

had been directed to Jesus by John's pointing him out as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; and so convinced was Andrew of the Divine character and mission of Jesus, that his first errand of love was in search of his brother Peter, "and he led him to Jesus." Humanly speaking, therefore, Peter owed his call to the affection of his brother. Peter, and most probably Andrew, as well as James and John the sons of Zebedee, were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, but they do not appear to have been men of the lowest class. No doubt they were in no degree among the high and the noble—not many mighty, not many noble were called—but we have no reason to suppose that either Peter or the sons of Zebedee were ignorant, illiterate, or low-born men. They no doubt earned their livelihood by their trade and labour, so did their companion Paul, afterwards; and every Jew, of whatever rank, was taught at least a trade and occupation; but we find these disciples in possession of boats and nets, and the usual implements of their calling, and accompanied by hired servants. And yet assuredly neither they nor the rest were men of station or attainments, such as any man would, with human forethought alone, have selected as his chosen instruments for effecting a mighty purpose; and we may still say, in the words of the prophet, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts;" or, in the language of St. Paul, that "God chose the foolish

things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty."

And now the same thing occurred which had happened so recently before. Jesus and His disciples had entered into a house, and the multitude, in their eagerness to hear and to see Him, had so flocked around it, that his very moments of retirement were invaded and interrupted; yet He did not order them to leave, He did not command the doors to be closed against them, but He had compassion on them, as sheep that had no shepherd, and continued to teach and instruct with the same unwearied love and zeal as He had done before. He is, however, interrupted, not, as on the former occasion, by the paralytic cripple being let down before Him in silent supplication for His aid, but by the mistaken and over-zealous efforts of His friends, who would fain have rescued Him from what they deemed so unnecessary an exertion of zeal. They did not, they could not, understand His motives, and probably looked on Him as a heated enthusiast, who needed some little restraint; and, in affectionate but mistaken kindness, would have had him withdraw for a season from His work. Alas! how often would misguided affection say to many a zealous disciple of Christ in these days, "Spare thyself!" and there is unhappily a feeling within too ready to take part with the suggestion. When our Lord said, "A man's foes shall be they of his own

household," how painful the truth He uttered, not only in the sense in which He spake it, but in a variety of ways! How often has the first shaft of ridicule been aimed at one who was seeking after Christ, from the quiver of one he loved! how often have those of his own household thrown impediments in his way, and sought by every device and allurement to wean him from following the Lord fully! The open assaults of enemies are neither so painful nor so dangerous as the mistaken, and perhaps affectionate, remonstrances of those who may love you well, but not wisely, and who think to do you good by urging a less decided religious standing, a less open and avowed association with those who follow Jesus, and a little more mingling with the world, to counteract the undue preponderance of religious impressions. I cannot imagine that these friends and relations of Jesus were influenced by other than affectionate motives, for we find, at the close of the chapter, His mother among those who would have had Him spare Himself. Alas! how sad that even a mother, as is so often the case, should stand in a child's way to heaven! A mother is the most powerful instrument for good or evil to a child: it is from her the earliest and most vivid as well as lasting impressions are received; and as many a testimony of a child's gratitude indelibly records the deep debt owing to a mother's piety, devotion, and instruction, so I fear the last day will bring

ıt far more numerous instances in which a
ɜ ruin may be traced to the evil example
ıstruction of a mother's lip and life.

SECTION X.

(Chapter iv. verses 1—21.)

ɛ seed which the Sower in this parable goes
to sow is the Word of God. The grain
our Lord Himself scattered with unsparing
alike over the barren or the fertile fields of
ıe and Judea, were the saving truths of His
ıoly gospel. The same seed, the same grain,
ıpostles carried into every land whither-
: they were dispersed; and from the same
ıouse of everlasting truth does He direct
ıinisters now to take their seed and scatter
:oad. It is, in fact, what the apostle
ıtically declares he was commissioned to
ɪ, "the unsearchable riches of Christ." If,
'ore, Christ be not preached, the seed is not
and that preaching is in vain: if mere
ity be substituted instead of the pure doc-
of the cross of Christ, and the one all-
ent atonement for the sins of the whole
; if human tradition or authority, if the
:h herself, instead of the Head of the
:h, usurp the paramount place of God's
n Word, then the seed is adulterated, and, of
ɜ, the produce will correspond to the seed

sown. But are we entitled to say, that where the seed is good, the produce will be good also,—that there will be no impediments in the soil to disappoint the labours of the husbandman, no growth of "thorns and briers" to demand his utmost care, no need of the dews, and rain, and sunshine of heaven to bless and prosper his handywork? The parable warns us that such will not be the case. The seed here sown was undoubtedly good, for the seed was the Word of God, and the Sower was the Lord Himself; and yet a fourth part only of the seed fell on good ground, and was preserved. That scattered on the wayside does not come up at all; that which was sown on the stony ground, came up, indeed, but did not increase; and that which fell among the thorns, though it increased, brought forth no fruit; while that alone which was sown on the good ground, bare fruit to perfection. The seed in all these cases was the same, but the difference was in the soil; and as in natural, so in spiritual husbandry, the Word may be the same, but the difference is in the heart. Something, no doubt, must be ascribed to the after care and diligence of the husbandman; and even, after all, though Paul may plant, and Apollos water, it is God alone that giveth the increase. It is the Spirit alone that taketh away the stony heart, and the grace of God alone that can preserve from injury amid the entanglements and snares of an encroaching world.

It was not, however, in Judea nor Galilee alone that barren soils were found; it was not among the proud and prejudiced Pharisees, nor the sceptic Sadducee, nor the worldly Herodian alone, that hearts were cold and callous and unhumbled. Long before Jesus preached in their streets and villages, it was the complaint of a prophet among them, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" and after He had withdrawn from His work on earth, and had left His apostles to continue their labours of love, it was still the melancholy protest of one who was more abundant in labours than they all, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." It is a solemn reflection, that we ourselves come under one or other of these classes of hearers, and that our eternal condition depends on the one to which we belong. A husbandman may sow his seed, and his crop may fail; but he can supply the deficiency from other sources, and another harvest may replace his loss; but no other source can supply the loss or neglect of God's Word; and if "the summer be ended, and the harvest past, and we be not saved," "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." "There is hope of a tree," says Job, "if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease;" but if "the axe be once laid to *the root* of the tree," it is

hewn down for ever, and its end is to be burned. It is sad to think that there are so many hinderances to fruitfulness—that so many loiter and play on the wayside, and almost, as it were, themselves tempt the devil—that the hearts of so many become hardened, and beaten down, and trodden like a high-road, or foot-path across a field, on which no seed can find any covering or soil—that the stones encumber, and the thorns and briers entangle, so much that for a time looks promising, but soon withers or becomes choked. It is alike true of churches and of individuals; but the Lord expects fruit, and the Lord looks for fruit. He looked to His church at Jerusalem that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth only wild grapes; He came to the fig-tree looking for fruit, but found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and the doom was alike the same—the vineyard was trodden down and devoured, and the fruitless tree dried up and withered.

SECTION XI.

(Chapter iv. verse 21 to the end.)

THE injunction which our Lord, at the close of the parable of the Sower, delivered to His disciples, "Take heed how ye hear," and the simile of a lighted candle, with which He introduced it, are most valuable to us all. The precept was not

confined to those who heard it; it was not important to them alone to take heed how they heard: the same truths are delivered to us, the same lessons are taught to us, and the Word which is sown in our hearts is that Word by which we must be judged at the last day. It is intended, too, for use: the talent which the Lord intrusts to our keeping is not like that of which the unprofitable servant made so bad a use, to be buried in the earth, or laid up in a napkin; it is to be brought forth for use, and not only for our own use and our own good, but the use and the good of others. The figure by which our Lord illustrates this is a homely but very expressive one. A lamp or candle is not brought into a room at night in order to have its light concealed, it is not hidden under a vessel to waste its light in useless brilliance, but is placed in such a position that all within its reach may alike share in its benefits. And so there is no human being who is to live for himself alone, or may think that he will be justified in neglecting the good of others by saying that he has been attending to his own. A candle is but a simple instrument of light, yet, as far as it goes, and to the extent of its means, it gives light to those who sit around it; and so each one of us may be, as far as our individual abilities go, very poor and inefficient creatures, and yet there is not a being that lives that cannot do good to others, if he but try in the same spirit with Peter, "Silver and gold have

I none, but such as I have give I unto thee." The gospel of Jesus Christ sets itself so resolutely and unflinchingly against all selfishness of character; its every principle and precept is so opposed to selfishness, that I do not think it too strong to say that there cannot be such a character as a selfish Christian. The words are a contradiction, and he must be very backward in the school of Christ, and have but little indeed of that mind which was in Christ Jesus, who is unwilling to spend and be spent in promoting the good of his fellow-beings. It may be that your efforts for the good of others can be but insignificant. I know it. I know it to be true, even of the most zealous, the most active, the most self-denying, that his *best* is stained with sin, and his *all* is nothing worth; but still, insignificant and worthless as they are in themselves, no one can tell, no arithmetic can calculate, the amount of good which any one, however humble and lowly, can effect, who is really in earnest to do good, all the good he can. The seed which the sower sows is but a tiny grain in itself,—it may seem scattered at random, it may apparently lie unheeded and buried beneath the clods: the husbandman quits his field, and leaves it, as we may say, to its fate: he returns to his home and his rest, and thinks not of the little grain he has left behind in the furrow: he rises up the next morning and betakes himself to other occupations, and is still apparently forgetful and heedless

of the seed he has committed to the ground. But what is that seed doing all the while? it was committed to the ground in faith, that is, in full confidence that it would fulfil its purpose, and that in due time the sower should reap, if he fainted not. And so it is. God's rain, and dew, and sunshine fall on that field, and the seed, so apparently left uncared for, begins to swell beneath the clod, we know not how; we see not the wondrous process which is going on underground: how from its swollen and bursten cuticle springs forth the tiny root, how that spreads forth its fibres, and gains nutriment from the soil around, and then appears the green and vigorous blade, gradually shooting upwards into the ear, and after that the full and ripened corn in the ear. And that grain, thus increased and thus ripened, not only produces bread to the eater, but seed to the future sower, and thus, like the fruit-tree of Paradise, whose seed was in itself, its usefulness never ceases, and "while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall never cease." So it was with the seed of the gospel when first scattered; so it is with every seed sown now; and so it may be with a word dropped in season into some ready, open heart: you may forget that you have dropped it, you see not the growth, you hear no note or sound of growth, and yet, after a time, like a new-sown field that looks green and lovely to the eye, that

word may produce a ripened harvest of Christian grace and Christian conduct. "The lips of the righteous," says Solomon, "feed many." The righteous poor by their pious conversation do as much good as the rich man by his bounty; their lips feed, *i. e.*, instruct, counsel, and console many. At any rate, however dim the light may shine to others, the precept to ourselves is plain, "Take heed how ye hear." Your light is to shine before men, that others, seeing it, may glorify God; and the light at which you must kindle your own is that Word of God which is to be a lantern unto your feet and a light unto your paths. Do not be afraid, like those virgins in the parable, that there may not be enough for you, and for others too; so abundant is it that God uses the very metaphor of the Sower, and declares that "light is *sown* for the righteous," and "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

SECTION XII.

(Chapter v. verses 1—21.)

JESUS had taken ship with His disciples to cross over to the coasts of Gadara, and, wearied with the labours of the preceding day, had sunk into a calm and peaceful slumber. Ere, however, they had reached the haven where they would be,

a storm arose, baffling all their efforts, and, for a time, threatening to engulf their frail and feeble bark. Undisturbed, however, by the roar of the elements, the holy Jesus slept on, till at length the disciples, helpless and hopeless in themselves, awoke Him with almost the language of reproach, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" At His command the storm was hushed; the winds obeyed the voice of Him who said, "Peace, be still," and there was a great calm. What a wonderful union is here exhibited to us of the two natures of the ever-blessed Jesus—God and man in one Christ—perfect God and perfect man! Jesus as man, wearied and giving way to slumber; and Jesus as God, rebuking the winds and the waves; and they obeyed Him! Scarcely, however, had their feet touched the land, than one more fierce almost than the unbridled storm met them—a man with an unclean spirit. Outcast from his fellow-men, this unhappy being dwelt only on the mountains, or amid the sepulchres of the dead,—cut off from every living tie, a hopeless prey to the malice of the Evil One; so fierce that no passing traveller dared to cross his path; so strong that no chains could bind him; and so devoid of reason, that night and day he filled the air with the wild howlings of the maniac, while, in his fury, he wreaked his rage upon himself by cutting and wounding himself with the sharp stones that lay around him. Alas! do we not discover in this *miserable* object some resemblance

to ourselves, before Jesus in mercy met with us, as He met with him? Rescued from bondage like unto his is every converted child of God, every son reconciled in Christ Jesus, and brought nigh unto God by the Holy Spirit. "Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," is the Saviour's description of fallen man; and in this poor maniac of Gadara we may find many a resemblance to ourselves. Under bondage to Satan, and, in many an instance, possessed by a legion of evil spirits, ungoverned passions, unruly lusts, and unholy tempers; naked, for we have no righteousness of our own; quitting, like the prodigal in the parable, our Father's home, and wandering into far worse abodes than the sepulchres of the dead—even among the living dead, the dead in trespasses and sins—and wounding both our bodies by our vices and our souls by our sins, do we not present to the eyes of the blessed Jesus a spectacle as truly pitiable and helpless as that which met His sight on the shores of Gadara? Yet on this melancholy, miserable man did the Saviour of sinners cast an eye of compassion and of love. He who but a few minutes before had quelled the raging billows of the sea, and with a word had hushed the winds, even from His lips came forth, with equal power, the fiat of His will, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit;" and he was obeyed. And if His eye look not on *us* in love and mercy, we are undone for ever; if He put not, of His own

free will, the hand to heal; if His voice bid not the evil spirit come out from us, we must perish. We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves, any more than we find this miserable demoniac putting forth a single cry for deliverance; nor till He draw us, can we draw nigh to God. It was a blessed word, even for unthankful Gadara, which Jesus spake to this man, when he sought permission to follow Him,—"Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." We might have thought that, as He had done before to other cities of Galilee, he would have taken up His parable against this inhospitable people; but no! there was still mercy even for the senseless Gadarenes; if they would but hearken to the message, there was still yearning love and compassion over these sinners against their own souls. The fields of Gadara were but indeed white already to the harvest, but there might be seed sown, which would in time spring up: though her furrows were yet unwatered, and her little valleys untilled, there might be here and there a grain ready to bud and blossom; and though His own voice would be heard no more among them, the living miracle still remained to tell that God had been of a truth among them. "Go home to thy friends—thy father's family, thy brothers and sisters, thy kinsfolk and friends, thy neighbours and acquaintance; go home to them, tell them of what I have done for thee, of what I

have said to thee, and even here thou mayest win souls." We hear, indeed, no more of him, nor of those to whom he preached, save that "he began to publish what God had done for him, and that all men marvelled." Many returned, we may fear, to their farms and merchandise, their unholy traffic and worldly gains; but He who sent him could never have meant to send him where the whole land was barren; and I doubt not, that in that day when the Lord makes up His jewels, even from this land of Gadara shall some arise who were won to Christ by the simple teaching, the holy conversation, of this healed demoniac, who had sat at the feet of Jesus. It cries aloud to each one of us, Go and do thou likewise. Be instant in season and out of season; scatter seed wherever you go, wherever you can, —in your own household, in your own neighbourhood. It does not need the tongue of the wise, nor the lips of the eloquent,—it only asks love to God and Jesus; and be assured that love, if sincere, would rather stammer than be dumb.

SECTION XIII.

(Chapter v. verse 21 to the end.)

THESE little incidental by-cures of our Lord, such as this which He performed on the poor woman who had suffered so many years with an incurable disease, afford us a very valuable lesson,

if we will but learn it. It brings before us, in a very touching manner, one of those many opportunities which every day's occurrences present to us of doing good, if we will but lay ourselves open to them, and avail ourselves of them when they do occur. There are those who do not look *out* for opportunities of kindness, though they might not overlook them if they fell in their way; and there are others who look *off* such opportunities, that is, they turn away their eyes when they do meet them, and, like the priest and Levite, pass by on the other side. I am now, however, speaking of those who are ever on the watch, who suffer no incident to escape them, no opportunity to pass unimproved; and to such, occasions of doing good will be ever presenting themselves. It was so with Jesus in the present instance. He was on His way to the ruler's house, on an urgent appeal from an afflicted father for a dying child: every moment, in the eyes of the parent at least, seemed most valuable; sympathy for another's suffering would be merged in the deep anxiety for his own, and he would urge even the willing Saviour to the utmost haste. Yet on the road a cure is performed as wondrous as that to which He was hastening, and, if possible, with more evidence of tenderness and compassion than in the restoration of the child to its sorrowing father and mother. It is true, Jesus was apparently an unconscious instrument of the healing of this poor woman who met Him by the way: with a strange

mixture of faith and credulity she thought that, though the Saviour had in Himself the "virtue," or the power to heal, she could, as it were, steal a cure unknown to Him. Oh! strange inconsistency! that the very Being whose touch, nay, the hem of whose garment, could convey a miraculous and Divine power to heal, could yet be unconscious of His own act, and of the inherent "virtue" that resided in Him! There was, indeed, a strange timidity and unbelief mixed up even with her faith, though that faith predominated, and was the prevailing instrument of her cure. No doubt her many years of suffering, her lengthened depression and disappointment, that hope long deferred which maketh the heart sick, her wasted strength and exhausted means, had all contributed to dispirit, and render her hopeless at least of human aid. Her very disease, too, according to the law, rendered her unclean, and she might doubt whether Jesus would sanction an appeal from one so unfitted to come into His presence.

One cannot but feel interested in this natural struggle in the poor woman's feelings—her hopes, and fears, and yet her assurance that if she could but touch His clothes, she should be whole. On that point there was no doubt, no hesitation, and her faith was instantly rewarded: "the fountain of her blood was straightway dried up," and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. *Does not her case* represent very closely that of

the awakened sinner who has been long labouring under a heavy and grievous malady? He has sought relief in various ways; he has gone to the world, to society, to change of scene, to pleasure, and, it may be, to dissipation, but, like this woman, has been nothing bettered, but rather the worse. He has, however, heard too of Jesus as the sinner's Friend—as One whose errand was to seek and to save the lost; he has been told that Jesus never cast out one that came to Him—that all who have sought Him have been made whole of whatsoever measure or inveteracy of sin they had, and that His blood cleanseth from all sin; and he has gone to Jesus, he has set out to seek the Saviour, though, like her of whom we are reading, he has felt unworthy to come into His presence; and he has sat, as it were, on the threshold, he has lingered on the outskirts, that, perchance, a glance, the mere shadow of His passing by, or the touch of the hem of His garment, may effect a cure. Like the centurion, though in a far different spirit, such as these send, as it were, a message, "Lord, I am not worthy to come into Thy presence, or that Thou shouldest come under my roof." But, oh! how derogatory such feelings, how dishonouring to that boundless compassion, how distrustful of that precious promise, which bids us "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," and which declares that "He is able to save to the utter-

most all that come unto God by Him"! Who shall set bounds or limits to God's *uttermost?* It is something of a similarly dishonouring feeling that keeps so many trembling, and doubting, and hesitating on the outskirts of the Lord's table, as if the invitation were not to them, as if they were unclean and unfitted to sit down with the Saviour whom they love at His own appointed feast. They will come to the threshold, they will hear the invitation, they will look with longing, wistful eyes, as if approach were barred, even while Jesus turns and says, "There yet is room;" "Come without money and without price." And they go away to try and find and bring something of their own, for which they may be welcomed. And yet what a tender, nay, loving rebuke does Jesus give to such, as He did here to this poor woman, "Daughter, be of good comfort"! He remembers only her love, her faith; and the only allusion to her fears and doubts is to bid her "go in peace."

SECTION XIV.

(Chapter vi. verses 1—14.)

THE country here called our Lord's own country is no doubt Nazareth, in contradistinction to Capernaum, where He had more generally resided since His public ministry. In Nazareth He had *spent* all the earlier years of His life on earth,

and from the expression here used, "Is not this the carpenter?" it is very probable that Jesus Himself, in His youth, worked at that trade, and assisted his reputed father, Joseph. I cannot see any reason why we should discredit such a fact, or deem it derogatory to Jesus. It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren in everything, sin only excepted; and as every Jew was taught a trade, it is far from unlikely that He was taught that by which the household of His reputed father, and His mother, were supported; and far from unnatural that He should Himself labour at it: for we know that Joseph was a poor man, and Jesus still poorer. It is, therefore, a valuable and consolatory lesson, which the humblest mechanic and artisan may derive from this circumstance, that Jesus, by His own practice as well as precept, has given dignity to a life of honest, lowly industry, even though it be struggling with difficulties and poverty. He came not, as He Himself tells us, to be ministered unto, but to minister; and when, in after years, His zealous Apostle, Paul, declared that his own hands had ministered to his necessities, he doubtless remembered his Master's practice, and was cheered and encouraged in his own labours. It was at Nazareth that He had commenced His ministry: and, alas! as He Himself tells us, "A prophet hath no honour in his own country." They not only refused to listen to Him, but would have dragged *Him to* the brow of the hill on which

their city was built, to cast Him down and destroy Him. It was in consequence of this treatment that He quitted Nazareth, and henceforth dwelt at Capernaum; but we find Him here again, returning with undiminished affection to the home and acquaintances of his childhood, still yearning over them to do them good, and, still disappointed, met only with revilings and reproaches. "They were offended at Him." It is a very strong expression, and one frequently used in Scripture,—and alas! one may indeed exclaim of many in the present day, What! the truth as it is in Jesus, an offence! the offer of a full and free salvation, unpurchased by any works of our own, an offence! the doctrine of the Holy Spirit renewing and making clean the polluted heart of man, an offence! And yet it is so: and why? Because men do not love God's law. "Great peace," says David, "have they which love Thy law, and nothing shall offend them." How many things are an offence or occasion of stumbling, even to the child of God! How often has even one who is careful to order all his goings in the Lord's paths—how often has he occasion to mourn over some short-coming or misdoing, some offence that has met him by the way, and caused him, if not to fall, at least to trip; some self-denial that he has evaded, some duty that he has procrastinated, some mercy that he has slighted, some invitation and call that he has disregarded, or put off to a more convenient *day*! Offences, or occasions of falling, meet us in

every place; they assail us in the world, in our business, our duties, in our own homes, and amid those we love; they find us even on our knees in private prayer; they follow us to the house of God, and, even there, disincline us to duty.

The offence to these Nazarenes was the recollection that Jesus had once walked among them in lowly guise, and His present claim as a teacher sent from God, as the predicted One, whom the Spirit of the Lord had anointed to preach the Gospel and to heal the broken-hearted, even though that claim were attested by miracles such as no man could do, unless God were with him. They closed alike their ears, their eyes, and their hearts. Jesus could do among them no mighty work;—but does this, can this imply a lack of power in Jesus? does it suggest that even unbelief could tie up, as it were, His hands, and hinder His prerogative of healing? We can hardly imagine this: it is said that He did lay His hands on a few sick folk, and healed them; and the same power that was mighty to save a few, would have been equally mighty to save many, had they been willing recipients of His mercy: but the unbelief, at which it is said He marvelled, was no doubt the cause that prevented the faithless, hardened Nazarenes from bringing their sick to be healed. Those that were brought He healed; they that applied not for aid remained *uncured*. *It is* the same with our spiritual

maladies: if, in faith, we take them to Jesus, He will heal them; if, in unbelief, we "restrain prayer before God," we shall go on yet in our sins.

SECTION XV.

(Chapter vi. verses 14—29.)

THERE is something very instructive in this portion of Scripture, relative to Herod and his intercourse with John the Baptist. The first impressions which John made on Herod's mind were all favourable, and augured much good. Herod was thoroughly convinced that John was a just and a holy man, and, as such, had strong feelings of reverential fear and observance of him. Everything in John's character tended to augment his respect towards him; and he seems to have retained the Baptist in his immediate neighbourhood from a sincere desire to attend his ministry, and be guided by his counsels. Nay, he went much further: he listened with approval and gladness of heart, and not only listened, but did accordingly; and it is probable that, both in his public and private conduct, he was, to a certain extent, influenced by the teaching and remonstrances of his faithful monitor. It is said here, that he "feared" John. Had he feared God as well as man, he would have been preserved from the deed which stained his hands *with blood*, and his soul with guilt. There was,

however, one sin which was as yet too dear to part with; and the faithful preacher did what Herod did not—he feared God, though he did not fear man, and would not leave the sinner unrebuked in his sin. He laid his finger on the plague-spot of Herod's life and heart, and with the boldness, and in the spirit, of his forerunner Elijah, at once denounced the adulterer and adulteress. As it was Jezebel that stirred up Ahab to his most glaring sin of the murder of Naboth, so Herodias now stirs up Herod, to wreak her vengeance on the Baptist. It is very possible, and I think probable, that even at this moment Herod himself had no unkind intentions towards John. His remonstrance, as narrated in the brevity of the gospel, may perhaps strike us as unnecessarily harsh, and impoliticly abrupt; but while, with uncompromising fidelity, as a messenger sent from God, he may have denounced the sin, he may have preserved the reverential demeanour due to his sovereign, while he would urge him, by every argument, to withdraw from so painful and criminal a connexion. But Herod—though he could do many things, and even gladly, at the counsel of John—had no idea of that self-denial which would forego a darling and habitual sin, nor ever dreamed of that sacrifice which required the cutting off a right hand, or the plucking out a right eye, rather than sin against God. But no man can say to *sin*, "*Thus far* shalt thou go, and no farther."

Herodias's whole soul was up in arms, and Herod soon found, with many a brother and sister in iniquity, that one sin persisted in inevitably leads to worse.

I do not know any narrative in Scripture so painfully illustrative of the dangers and fatal consequences to which a sinful entanglement and a guilty connexion, like that of Herod's, so inevitably lead; or which is such an almost literal and emphatic comment on the words of one who himself sat on the throne of Judah, and knew, from his own sad experience, the miseries and perplexities of such a path, when, in his later years, he left such earnest and touching precepts, "to deliver from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life." I do not lay claim to any soul-awakened conviction in Herod's heart; I do not imagine that he was an humble penitent, or that he had yet asked, in the spirit of one afterwards, "What must I do to be saved?" but there was the germ of much that was good: he had so far set out, that he had, as we may say, arrived at the strait gate leading into the narrow way. His resolution, however, shrunk back when he saw the sacrifices which *the gospel* demanded—when the very first step

required that his companion in sin must be left behind. It is possible that he had not the courage to encounter the reproaches of his fellow-sinner, and that he chose rather the reproaches of his own conscience, which he could in some degree silence, to the angry invectives and bitter accusations of Herodias. Alas! he knew not, when he listened to the one and silenced the other, that he should soon add the testimony of his own sad experience to that of Solomon, that "her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead." I do not say that every similar connexion will issue in the same consequences, though the annals of crime record, in letters of blood, how often this has been literally true; but in every case, even if it lead not to murder or to suicide, it at least perils, and, if unrepented of, and unforsaken, must end in the destruction of body and soul in hell.

SECTION XVI.

(Chapter vi. verses 30—35.)

In the earlier part of this chapter, we had the commission, which Jesus gave to the twelve, to go forth, and preach the Kingdom in the various districts of the country; and we have here their return recorded. I can well imagine with what grateful joy they must have recounted to their Lord, how every promise He had made them had

been abundantly fulfilled; how disease had fled at their touch, and even the devils were subject unto them; and how, in all their wanderings, provision for the way had been supplied to them. They might, perhaps, have to acknowledge that here and there their faith had for a moment failed, that their courage had shrunk before some difficulty and danger; or, it may be, to confess that, in some exhibition of the miraculous power with which they were invested, a vain-glorious thought had passed through their mind, as if by their own might they had prevailed. But, be this as it may, it affords us a solemn subject of meditation, to reflect that we too must return to Jesus, and tell Him all things, both what we have done, and what we have taught; that we are accountable to Him for all the powers He has given us, the opportunities He vouchsafes, and the means He affords. To ministers, indeed, it is an awful thought to dwell on the account they have to render. Jesus now, as He did then, equally commissions them to go forth and preach the Gospel. He does not, indeed, enjoin the same privations, and the same hardships, and the same perils; but the good soldier of Jesus Christ must endure hardness still; if he would be victorious in the conflict, he must still deny himself, and take up his cross daily. And when his commission is ended, and his Master recalls him from the errand on which he was sent, and the *work which* was given him to do, he also, like

these twelve, must return to Jesus, and tell Him all things, both what he has done and what he has taught. But it is not apostles nor ministers only that have to return to Jesus, and give an account to Him; all that are in their graves must stand before His judgment-seat; and we must be among the number. You may, perhaps, think that your account will be confined only to what you have done, and that, of our present party, I am the only one who have to give account of what I have taught you. But it is not so: teaching is not confined to the minister's or master's lips, nor is it limited only to what is good. There may be —and, alas! there is continually—instruction in what is bad as well as in what is good; and there is, too, teaching by example as well as precept. An older may teach a younger a great deal that is injurious and wrong, and even that younger may scatter seeds of bad counsel, or disobedient practice, which may produce many a choking weed. It would be endless to enumerate the ways in which this sort of teaching may be applied: it may be in encouraging what is wrong; it may be in checking what is right; and it may be by withholding teaching, when it is in our power to drop a word in season. An older companion with a younger; an older servant with one less experienced, and more easily drawn aside; a sneer, a jest, a laugh, a hint, a look, nay, even silence itself, may teach; and few take into account that they must return to Jesus, to tell Him all that

they have done and taught. He sends each one on his errand of life; and there is not one so lowly, or so youthful, or so separated from his kind, but into his hands are put ways and means of teaching; and he, too, will have to tell his unerring Judge hereafter whether he has both taught and done what is right, rather than what is wrong.

There is something inexpressibly touching in the tenderness with which Jesus bids His disciples "rest a while." He knew whereof they were made; He remembered that they were but dust and ashes; He Himself had known what weariness and exhaustion were, and how lengthened labour and mental toil could bow man's poor feeble frame; and, with a feeling sense of, and tender compassion to their weakness, He says to His disciples, "Rest a while." He who gave the Sabbath, gave also rest; He who appointed the night season, appointed also rest. Man's frame and man's mind were never meant for continual strain and tension; and the Saviour wishes, the Saviour claims for all, periods of rest and cessation from the burden. Alas! how different man! how different an earthly master from our heavenly Father! He will exact to the uttermost farthing, and beyond it. He will take of man's day of rest, and demand, for his own gains and his own works, that which God gave in love to His overburdened ones. He will enact Nathan's parable over again, and, not content with the abundance of his own *six days, will take* the poor man's one little ewe

lamb—his solitary day of rest, his day of especial blessedness—and appropriate it to his own use. "Rest a while" is Nature's demand, and God's appointment; and the Lord will have a fearful controversy with those who, in the day of their fast, "on the Lord's own day, and man's day of rest," exact their wonted labours. "Rest a while:" it is the earnest aspiration of "the whole creation, which groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now:" it is that for which man so sigheth and longeth; even the wearied and jaded worldling, still treading his round of pleasure, craves it; and the cry of all God's children is, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly;" bring us to Thy rest, that "rest which remaineth for the people of God."

SECTION XVII.

(Chapter vi. verses 36—45.)

When our Lord was an hungred in the wilderness, after His passing forty days the tempter came to Him and said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." There would evidently have been no sin in the act itself. If Jesus possessed the power, the creative power of God, He might, if He had so pleased, have commanded the stones around to supply food for His necessities; and, in fact, we *find Him here so* exerting His authority, as to

multiply, from a few barley loaves and fishes, a more than abundant meal for many thousands. What, then, were the varied circumstances which caused Him to repel the suggestion, in the first instance, with indignation and abhorrence, and in the latter, to do the very thing He had before refused to do? In the first place, compliance with the tempter's proposition would have betokened distrust of God; while His adoption of the very same measure afterwards, implied His unwavering confidence and reliance on His Father's care and love. The act, in the first instance, would have been for the relief of His own necessities; in the latter, it was for the relief of an hungry and fainting multitude. The first was the suggestion of an enemy—"an enemy hath done this;" the latter was the impulse of His own tender compassion and yearning over the wants of others. The first would have been to the dishonour of God; the latter was for man's good, and His Father's glory. There is not only something very consolatory in this exhibition of the tender pity of the Saviour for the bodily wants of those who had so eagerly and so patiently followed Him; but there is something very striking and impressive in the act itself, and the manner in which His strength supplies the weakness of His people. As when Paul shrunk before the infirmity of the thorn in the flesh, and besought the Lord to remove it from him, and *the Lord replied,* "My grace is sufficient for

thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness;" so here, when to try His disciples' faith, He said to them, "Give ye them to eat," they not only at once acknowledged their own utter inability, and would have had Him send them away unrelieved and unfed, but they even imply a doubt of their Lord's power. Like their doubting forefathers of old, they said, in their hearts at least, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? can He give bread? can He provide flesh?" or, rather, it never seems to have entered their minds, that there was any mode of supplying the demand, but by a literal purchase of food sufficient for so great a multitude—a purchase, they well knew, far beyond their Master's earthly means. "Shall we go," they ask,—if not in scorn, at least in incredulity,—"shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?" They had altogether forgotten how, in their own annals, it was recorded that the Almighty had—not once, but for forty years—fed the thousands of Israel with bread in the morning, and flesh in the evening, in the wilderness. How often does it happen that a servant, a minister of Christ, looking around on the flock he is appointed to feed, hears his Saviour saying to him, "Give them to eat," and he has neither strength for the task, nor food for the supply, in and from himself! Shall he, then, retire in despondence? shall he give up in despair? shall he say, in the *spirit of unbelief* of these disciples, "Whence

shall a man have bread in the wilderness?" Let him look to this incident in the history of Jesus, and take courage for his own course. In every emergency, in every trial and perplexity, in weariness of mind and exhaustion of body, let him still rely on Jesus. Jesus will take the simplest food which His minister can supply, and, with His blessing upon it, will convert it into ample and substantial nutriment for the soul. It was in no degree the act of these disciples; they were but the distributors of another's bounty; it was the blessing alone of Jesus that rendered the meal sufficient. And so, too, Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but it is God alone that giveth the increase.

There is another lesson to be gathered from this miracle; it is, if I may so call it, a domestic incident, a lesson to be practised in our own homes, and a lesson never out of place in any home; and one which sweetly illustrates the character of that superintending Providence which numbers the very hairs of our head, and counts even a sparrow precious in His sight. He would have nothing wasted, nothing lost. And if He, whose are the cattle on a thousand hills, who filleth all things living with plenteousness,—if He has not disdained to teach us a lesson of economy, surely we can hardly think ourselves above the necessity of learning it.

SECTION XVIII.

(Chapter vi. verse 46 to the end.)

ST. MARK follows the track of the preceding Gospel very closely; but though he often omits much which Matthew records, he as often adds a word or a fact which we miss in the other, but which throws additional interest around the story. For instance, in this incident of the storm which overtook the disciples, and of Jesus walking on the sea, St. Mark leaves out the circumstance of Peter's impetuous request that he might join his Master on the waves; and if, as is generally supposed, this Gospel was written under the direction, and with the sanction, of that apostle, one can well account for such an omission as this. But, then, there is a circumstance noticed by Mark, which we do not find in the other Gospels, and which yet adds immeasurably to the interest of the scene; and it is, that from the mountain whither Jesus had retired to pray, the whole expanse of the sea of Galilee lay before Him; and there Jesus beheld, in the distance, the boat in which the disciples were, struggling with the adverse winds and waves. "He saw them toiling in rowing." He saw their efforts, He knew their difficulties. He was engaged in secret prayer to His Father and their Father; and can we doubt what one portion of His prayer would be, and for whom, on that

night of solemn intercession, he would more especially plead, as He saw them toiling in the work He had given them to do? We are assured, indeed, that known unto God are all our ways, that He knoweth our down-sitting and our up-rising, that the very hairs of our head are all numbered; but one loves to see an instance thus brought before us, in which the Saviour and Intercessor, when on earth, was actually beholding and watching His disciples, as they were tossed up and down on the stormy sea. They saw not Him, but He saw them; they might think, amid the darkness and perils of the night, that He neither saw nor remembered them, or that, as He was absent, He could do them no good. And yet, they had just returned from their mission through the towns of Galilee, and had found every promise realized and fulfilled to them, in which, though wanting everything, they had lacked nothing. But, saith the Lord, by His prophet, "Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off? Is the Lord's hand shortened, that it cannot save, or His ear heavy, that it cannot hear?" Is Jehovah like unto Baal, that "peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked"? The Lord heard their cry, the Lord knew every thought and feeling of their heart; He saw all their toil, and His arm was mighty to save. Nay, more; His very pleadings and intercessions were going up, from His own solitary place of *prayer,* in their behalf to heaven. He who after-

wards especially prayed for one of that little band to save him from Satan, now prayed as earnestly and as fervently for them all. No doubt, as His eye saw their toils and fears, and His heart compassionated all their apprehensions; so His voice, even from that distant mountain, could have said to the winds and waves, "Peace, be still," and they would have obeyed Him. But He had other purposes of love and mercy and instruction in view. He knew that, as they were now toiling on the stormy waters, so they would have to strive against the far stormier currents of angry passions and embittered prejudices. He knew that as He had now withdrawn from them for a little while, so He was soon to withdraw from them altogether; and He would therefore teach them by this earlier, and, as it were, elementary lesson, to trust in and depend on an absent Saviour; that, though absent in body, He is ever present in Spirit, and knows every trial, and sees every struggle.

It is a valuable lesson to ourselves. We are on as stormy a sea as the disciples were on this night of toil: the winds and the waves are adverse to us; everything within, and without, and around, and on every side, would fain keep us from "the haven where we would be." We have no present Jesus; He is far out of our sight; but the eye of faith can see Him, not on the distant, lonely mountain, but at the Father's right hand interceding for

us. Even in the darkest hour of trial and of peril, faith, like that of the first martyr Stephen, can see the heavens opened, and Jesus, the Son of man, standing on the right hand of God. And it is an equally blessed privilege, that not only in such an hour of peril and extremity, if such befall, but in far less trying moments, even of despondency, a child of God may take every care, and lay it at the feet of Jesus. If it be such as to cause sorrow, or anxiety, or apprehension to His child, it is enough; the Father feels for that child, and bids him come to Him. In *all* our afflictions He is afflicted, and, though absent—nay, because He is absent, and at the right hand of power—He will be found a very present help in every time of trouble.

SECTION XIX.

(Chapter vii. verses 1—23.)

THE Apostle Peter, in disputing with certain who would have imposed the ceremonial law of Moses on the Gentile converts, spoke of it as a yoke which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear; and, assuredly, with all its various rites and ceremonies, it was a heavy and expensive burden. But the scribes and Pharisees, not content with what Moses, by Divine authority, had imposed and sanctioned, had added a number of other rites and institutions, to which they attached as *much*, or rather greater sanctity, than they did to

the precepts of the Mosaic law. And this is one of the most successful devices of the Evil One: it has for ever been his favourite weapon, and the use of which he has far from forgotten at the present time. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth." Such was the declaration of the Son of God Himself to the woman of Samaria, as He sat by the well-side—and who "knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him?" But while we are in the flesh, encompassed on every side by tangible and substantial objects—influenced by animal desires and passions, and led away by a thousand things that attract and engross our senses—it is contrary to our nature to forego all these feelings and influences, and be guided only by what is unseen and impalpable. Spiritual religion is the very last thing of which man, in his unregenerate state, would ever dream: a religion emanating from the heart, and from thence, as from its centre, diffusing itself over the whole of our life, walk, and conversation, is not among the inventions, or within the capacities of fallen man. It is the work of the Holy Spirit of God alone; and man can no more make the corrupt fountain of his heart pure, than he could change the briny waves of the ocean into fresh water. And yet man must have something of a religion, something which he thinks may stand him in stead; and there is nothing like a fair outside for his purpose, a

punctilious bustling adherence to empty ceremonies and insignificant forms. It is such an easy substitute: it is so much easier to perform a few unmeaning outward rites and ceremonies, than to take up the Saviour's cross, and deny one's self any one indulgence and gratification: it is so much slighter a sacrifice to give up a little time to an outward duty, than to surrender a single heart-lust, or darling sin, that the religion which puts outward form and show in the front, and, far more, that religion which substitutes body-work for heart-work, and ascribes superior merit, or equal efficacy, to an outward penance, or an unmeaning repetition, will always have its majority of followers and advocates, because it assimilates and adapts itself to the corrupt inclinations of man's carnal and unregenerate heart. When our Saviour described the sacrifices, which His followers in every age would have to make, by the significant image of cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye, He meant to intimate that real, heart-felt, sincere religion, with all its honest purposes and resolutions, with all its trials, conflicts, and temptations, its resistance of evil in every form and shape, its rejection of every compromise with the plain rule of God's Word, and its bringing, and keeping, every thought into captivity to the obedience that is in Christ, would be no easy task. I do not mean to deny that many of the penances, and macera*tions, and* austerities of the Church of Rome, or of

heathen and Hindoo devotees, are most painful, most revolting to natural ease and gratification—alike abhorrent to nature, and repugnant to reason; but I would say this of them all, without exception, that not one of them reaches the seat of the disease, not one touches the plague-spot of the heart, and all proceed from a most degraded and imperfect conception of the Divine nature and attributes, and, so far from doing away, or expiating, or atoning for, the sin they profess to blot out, only add to the guilt, and foster the corruption and pride of man's heart. It is an awful result which our Lord here declares to be the consequence of exalting human tradition, that it makes the Word of God of none effect. We might, in our ignorance, imagine just the contrary—that the brighter, clearer, and more effulgent blaze of God's Word would extinguish the little, feeble twinkling of man's fallible and corrupted reason. If a man were, indeed, to hold a candle to increase the noon-day brilliance of the sun, the boldest stickler for tradition would laugh at his folly and arrogance: and yet we are here assured, by one who cannot err, that the obscure and corrupted glosses and incumbrances of man's tradition will choke and nullify even God's own revealed Word, as certainly as the thorns and briars in the parable outgrew the good seed, and rendered it of none effect. The fact is, that in many an instance the Word of God is not suffered to come in contact with man's gloss and tradition: they are not

laid side by side, to allow men to discern and choose between them. The Bible is withdrawn from sight; its free and unfettered use is forbidden, and rendered difficult and dangerous; or, if its precepts are ever brought to view, they are so seen through the misty maze of man's multitudinous corruptions, and their light so enfeebled by the veil spread over the preoccupied heart, its declarations of prejudice are so frittered down and evaded, its precepts so compromised, and its doctrines so smothered and choked by man's additions, that melancholy experience amply confirms what our Lord here so painfully asserts,—that God's Word is, in reality, thereby made of none effect. I do not know that I can reiterate too often, or too strongly, that Scripture rule, "To the Law, and to the Testimony." It is the simplicity of Gospel truth which is its great offence to a carnal and corrupt world; and yet it is that very simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus, which is its most precious characteristic to those, who, "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word."

SECTION XX.

(Chapter vii. verse 24 to the end.)

We have already considered the narrative of this Syro-Phœnician mother, in the account given of the transaction in St. Matthew's Gospel. *I shall, therefore,* now only briefly remark, that it

affords a striking instance of great afflictions resulting in great mercies: that what may be considered, and are, in reality, serious trials and heavy dispensations, are, through the overruling providence and tender mercy of God, before they part company with us, often turned into undoubted blessings. To the eye of her neighbours, and to all around, this poor woman's calamity, in having a child so heavily afflicted, must have appeared a most painful and distressing one; no doubt, she looked upon herself as one sorely tried and burdened, as indeed she was. It is not by lessening her trial, or making light of it, that I would show the loving-kindness of Jesus; but it is in its very intensity, in the bitterness of a mother's wounded spirit, pleading for her possessed child, that I would lead you to see how the Lord was all the time fulfilling His own purposes of mercy. Had not her daughter been thus grievously afflicted, she would, in all probability, have never sought the Saviour, never have known the love and tenderness that was in His heart, never have received His gracious approval of her persevering prayer of faith, and never have returned to her home rejoicing in the Saviour she had found. She had, indeed, gone forth weeping, but she now came back again rejoicing, bringing abundant sheaves with her. Her sorrow, no doubt, was turned into joy, in that her child was healed, but, far beyond that, a song of praise and thanksgiving was put into her heart, and that of

her child, which we can have no doubt Eternity has not yet exhausted, and never will.

I do not mean to say, that every trial or affliction that may befall ourselves will be removed in a similar manner. The Lord's purposes of mercy may be more completely fulfilled in the continuance, than in the removal of a trial. The thorn in the flesh may be still continued; but grace more abounds. The cup which Jesus prayed might be taken from Him, was drained to its bitterest dregs; but an angel from heaven strengthened Him in His agony: and this I would say to every tried and suffering one, to all God's children, —that the ingredients of every cup of bitterness that is given them to drink, is mixed by a Father's hand, and that the acknowledgment in heaven of every one that has come out of great tribulation, is that there has not been one trial too many, one suffering too severe. And on earth we may be assured, that sanctified sorrow is a far more precious boon than unsanctified mirth.

There is a singularity in our Lord's manner on the occasion of this miracle, and the succeeding one of healing the deaf and dumb man, which we do not find on other occasions. In the case of the mother, he apparently rejects, and repudiates her supplication, as if His heart was not in every act of mercy; though it was but to try her faith, and give efficacy to persevering prayer: but, as regards the dumb man, He sighed even while He healed him, as if there were sorrow in His heart,

even for that act of mercy. One can hardly tell why such an expression of deep feeling should have been upheaved from the Saviour's breast on this occasion; the case was not so painful nor afflicting as many which He had healed, and in itself was little calculated to excite deep sympathy or commiseration. It might have been that He saw, in the multitudes around Him, or in the friends who brought him, evidences of a spirit that one more miracle, one more proof that He came forth from God, would be utterly disregarded, and that He sighed over their hardness of heart. Or was it, that He reflected how the gift of speech, which He was restoring to this poor man, is so often abused to sin? that the privilege of speech, by which He has distinguished us from the brutes, is by man's deep guilt converted so frequently into a curse? and that the tongue, which ought only to speak of praise to God, and loving-kindness to man, is too often prostituted to blasphemy against God, and bitterness towards a fellow-creature? I do not say that this poor man would have misused the privilege vouchsafed to him; yet the mercy and the miracle was no greater in his case than in each one of us, in each to whom speech is originally given. It is as much the gift of God, as if the string of every tongue were suddenly loosed, and we, from utter silence, spake plainly. And yet, have we never grieved God by our words? are not man's words continually going up before God, from every spot, and

crowded street, and nook, and corner, where man's speech is heard, and swelling that fearful register of idle and profane words, for which we must give account to Him? I remember, in my boyhood, looking down into a well, at the bottom of which a man was working: he had dug out a stone of considerable size, and it was being drawn up to the top, when, by some mismanagement, or some giving way of the machinery, it slipped, and thundered down again into the depth. I shall never forget the horror with which we all gazed after it, in the full conviction that the man must be crushed to death. It seemed an utter impossibility that he could escape; and yet, by the mercy of God, he did escape: not a hair of his head was injured; and the first intimation of his escape, the first accents that sounded forth from that abyss, was the most awful imprecation I had ever then heard, on the carelessness, as he thought, of those who had so put his life in peril. I fear that many a one, in that day when God shall call every idle word into judgment, will wish that they had never had the power of speech intrusted to their keeping.

SECTION XXI.

(Chapter viii. verses 1—21.)

We had, a short time ago, the similar miracle of our Lord's feeding a vast multitude with a few loaves and fishes. And here, then, is a similar multitude, equally needing, equally exciting the compassion of the tender Jesus, and as abundantly supplied with food, as those on the former occasion. And is not this an apt representation of Gospel plenty, a lively image of Gospel abundance—a miracle wrought in our own land every day in the week, and the year? Is not this the lesson which our Church so appropriately teaches at the close of her ecclesiastical year, by selecting this miracle in the Gospel of the day for our meditations? Are there not numbers now hungering and thirsting after righteousness? and God's declaration concerning them is, "Blessed are they: for they shall be filled." Jesus might well say to the Jews, "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead; but whoso eateth of the bread that I shall give him, shall never die." And He asserts of Himself that, "He is the true and living Bread, which came down from heaven."

Apply, then, this miracle of feeding the hungering multitude on such apparently scanty food, to the provision now made for those who are really hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Four hundred years ago, there was indeed

a famine in the land—I mean a famine of the Word of God: men groped their way in darkness, or, if they had any guide, it was but the blind leading the blind. Four hundred years ago, there was not a copy of the Word of God in any poor man's house in the land: nay, there were but few anywhere, and those only purchased at such a price, as almost to exclude any but the very wealthiest from possessing such a treasure. There were, no doubt, then—as in Ahab's time there were seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal—there were, no doubt, thousands in that period of Papal darkness, hungering and thirsting after spiritual food; and even then Jesus was saying, "I have compassion on the multitude." And yet, no doubt, if at that moment He had issued His orders, "Give ye them to eat," or "Send a Bible to every church and chapel, to every minister, and to every house, and to every worshipper in that house," there would have been those who, with far less culpable unbelief than these disciples (for *they had seen* the miracle performed), might, in a somewhat similar spirit of incredulity, have exclaimed, "From whence can a man supply such a store of Bibles?" For, remember, at the period of which I am speaking, the art of printing was not discovered; every portion of the Word of God was painfully and laboriously transcribed by the pen. Education was so scanty, that scarcely one noble, and not *one poor man,* could write at all; and the power

of writing was confined chiefly to a few monks, scholars, and merchants. Well then might one in those days have sighed deeply in spirit, as he thought of the impossibility to supply the Scriptures of Truth in the abundance which the Saviour, in His love and compassion, designed. Yet even then Jesus felt, and had said, "I have compassion on the multitude." Even then had the word gone forth, "Verily, they shall be fed." And they were fed, and they are fed, and they will be fed as long as their souls hunger. It is now exactly four hundred and three years since the art of printing was discovered; and there was then re-enacted, throughout Europe, that miracle of mercy which Jesus wrought, when He fed four thousand men on seven loaves. In England alone, the Word of God has been translated into more than a hundred and twenty languages, and dispersed amid the various climes and regions that use those languages; and if a single man, woman, or child, of the millions of Great Britain is without a copy of the Word of God, it is for the same reason which our Lord assigned for the Jews rejecting Him, "They will not." And as our Lord, on another occasion, said to the Jews, "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and condemn it," so we may say to all who, in these days, despise, disregard, or reject, or misuse, or scorn the gift of the Holy Scriptures, these hungering, Jewish multitudes shall rise up in judgment against, and

condemn them, for they followed the Saviour, clave to Him through every privation, and were gladly and gratefully partakers of the food He supplied. It is not, indeed, from His own hands that His people now receive their food; nor was it then: He blessed it, and then gave it to His disciples to distribute. And so it is now. He blesses His Word, that it "may not return unto Him void, but may accomplish that which He pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto he sends it;" but it is through other hands He still distributes—His disciples then, His ministers and servants now: and His declaration still remains on record, "He that despiseth you, despiseth me; and He that despiseth me, despiseth Him that sent me."

SECTION XXII.

(Chapter viii. verses 22—26.)

It is not, perhaps, worth while to inquire into the peculiar circumstances attending the healing of this blind man, and yet some most valuable instruction may be gathered from it. The city, we are told, was Bethsaida; and Bethsaida, you remember, was one of those cities over which Jesus had in sorrow pronounced a doom of woe, for disregarding the mighty works that had been done in her. Our Lord, therefore, probably took this man apart out of the town, as a melancholy

intimation and foreboding that mercy could no longer strive against judgment; that her day of grace was passed; that "space had been given her for repentance, and she repented not." It is a sad but salutary warning to those who go on hardening themselves against mercies as well as judgments. The Lord indeed is full of compassion, and plenteous in mercy; but He has said that His Spirit shall not always strive with man; and yet, as long as there is hope of a sinner's return, sentence shall not be executed speedily. As in the days before the flood, He gave them an hundred and twenty years as their day of grace, and even when that period was passed, yet seven more days, one week of respite still was granted, and then the predicted judgment came. It is sad that men's hearts should be so hardened by long impunity, and that, because the Lord in mercy withholds His hand from punishment, the sinner should use that mercy and delay as an encouragement to sin. Bethsaida's day of grace was indeed fully passed; that most awful of all sentences on a living sinner, "He that is unholy, let him be unholy," had passed the Almighty's lips, as regarded that guilty city. She was left to go on in her sin, unrebuked and unchecked; no more messages of mercy, no more calls to repentance, no more exhibitions of the Saviour's loving-kindness and tender compassion. How fearfully is all this evidenced in our Lord's conduct as regards this blind man! He leads him

out from the city, as if Bethsaida were no more worthy to witness another miracle,—as if it were an intimation that blindness should remain on her for ever. Though there was mercy and healing for the individual, the city was left to its doom. Nor was this all; when the man was healed, when light had been restored to his eyes, he is forbidden to enter into the town, nor even to tell to any inhabitant of Bethsaida how great things the Lord had done for him. How different this from the injunction to the healed demoniac at Gadara! "Go home to thy friends, tell them of the mercy you have found, and win souls to Me;" but Bethsaida had sinned against far greater light than Gadara, and that light was now, in righteous retribution, withdrawn.

I would make a remark or two on a singularity attending this cure; not on the means employed, why Jesus used any, or why He used those mentioned here in particular, for I can give no reason why He did so, save that it seemed good to Him; and that He who, by His prophet, said to Naaman, "Go, wash in Jordan seven times," might here choose to intimate, by the very means He used, how independent He was of all means. The cure, however, in this instance, was gradual, not instantaneous, as in other cases: "Be thou clean, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed;" "What will ye that I should do unto you? Lord, that our eyes may be opened:" and He touched their eyes, and immediately

their eyes received sight;" "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise: and he that was dead sat up." But it was not so here; and our Lord seems to intimate the gradual progress of that spiritual light which dawns upon the soul when first awakened to a conviction of sin, and a sense of danger. No doubt the Lord could, as in many an instance He did, at once "on the sightless eye-ball pour the day;" no doubt, as in Saul's case, the scales that fall from his eyes may let in the light of truth, as well as the light of day; but it is not so in the Lord's usual dealings, either with generations or with individuals. As Luther said, "I see more than Augustin saw; and those who come after me will see more than I see." And it was by most gradual process that Luther's eyes were opened. Luther at Wittenberg saw more clearly than Luther at Erfurth; and, at Augsburg and Worms, more clearly than he did at Wittenberg; and yet to the last the full light of truth never arose even to him. It is, however, to the awakened soul that the case more instructively applies. The first conviction of sin, and the first thought of an offended and angry God, led to concealment: "I was afraid," said Adam, "and I hid myself." The first conception of the Almighty's resistless power, and the first dawning of that truth upon the sinner's soul, led an apostle to say, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." There was far more light, far more love, when the same apostle said,

"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." It is but the realisation of the Lord's own promise, that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day;" that he whose strength is in the Lord shall "go from strength to strength;" and the prayer of the apostle for his Philippian converts was, that "their love might abound more and more, and that they might be filled with the fruits of righteousness," like some goodly tree laden with the fruits of autumn, even to its outermost branches and its topmost boughs.

SECTION XXIII.

(Chapter viii. verse 27 to the end.)

It is a very valuable prayer which the Psalmist has left on record: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." Had Peter remembered it, and uttered the same or a similar petition, he would not have fallen into the sin he did, nor have met with the severe and painful rebuke which he here received from Jesus. And yet Peter spake only from zeal, from love, from undoubted, though mistaken desire for his Master's glory, and what he deemed his Master's good. And yet even the motives from which his words sprang, in no degree lessened the sin attaching to his language, or miti-

gated the severity of the rebuke which he received. How truly does it illustrate the apostle's declaration, that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and how instantly does Jesus recall His misguided and indiscreet follower to a sense of his sin, by the unsparing severity with which He administered the correction! It ought to be a very instructive warning to ourselves; and, as I remarked a short time ago, I fear that speech is a far more frequent outlet of sin than any other faculty we have, and that we all, in this matter, have reason to take heed lest we fall. Like Moses, we may, in many an unguarded moment, speak unadvisedly with our lips; and like Peter here, may suffer our very zeal, our love, and impetuous purpose, to lead us too often to utter language which cooler reflection would never justify. I believe that many a man, in his over-zeal and over-haste, often lets fall words and expressions which he would afterwards give worlds to recall. How many things did the friends of Job give utterance to, which were unjust, as well as unkind, to him whom they came to comfort, and derogatory to God, whose prerogative they desired to uphold! and we may well say, with one of them, "How shall a man full of talk be justified?" Remember, therefore, David's prayer, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth;" and remember also David's practice, how that coincided with his prayer; how he kept his mouth as it were with a bridle, while the ungodly were

in his sight; how he held his tongue and spake nothing, and refrained even from good words, lest they should provoke, and lead to recrimination. The present is so great an age for religious talking, and religious controversy, there are so many Shibboleths of party started, and pursued with so much of acrimony, that the caution of watchfulness over your lips, valuable as it is at all times, is most necessary at the present day, when each one is so eager to test your sincerity, your proficiency, your love,—I might almost say, your Christianity,—by your adherence to, or rejection of, their own peculiar views and systems. The questions in the present day are so narrowed and personal, and, though some of them most important in themselves, are so treated as watchwords of a party, and brought so invidiously forward, that one almost feels in society as David felt when he said of himself, and of those with whom he came in contact, "I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war." I am afraid that we forget too much our Lord's caution, not to call any man on earth our father, for one is our Father which is in heaven; and in calling men our masters, we practically forget that one is our Master, even Christ. It was a sweet promise of those prophetic times of unity, and which assuredly are not these times, "One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and sur-

name himself by the name of Israel;" but, alas! it is far more common, in these days, for men to call themselves and others after earthly names, and to profess and follow the views, and adopt the opinions of fallible beings like ourselves. Oh! how would the question here proposed by our Lord, sweep away at once all those musty cobwebs which now intercept our view of Christ, —all those distinctions of party, sect, or denomination, which induce us to rest in a brother, or a leader's name, rather than in Christ Himself,— What do *we* think of Christ? Each one of us should, in much honesty and sincerity of purpose, ask ourselves, What, or who is Christ to me? It is but a poor answer to give, though it be a true one, "He is the Saviour;" it would be but a poor reply to use Peter's words, unless we have Peter's meaning, "Thou art the Christ." Can we, do we, with uplifted, adoring heart, say, each one, "He is *my* Saviour?" Have you felt in your inmost soul, like the poor woman of whom we read a little before, who came trembling and touching the hem of His garment? Have you felt, like her, that you are healed of your plague, the plague of your own heart, the plague of indwelling sin?—that you are called effectually, and that you are living by faith on the Son of God, resting all your hope on His one offering, His one sacrifice, His one atonement,—that Jesus is all in all to you, your wisdom, your righteousness, your sanctification, and redemption? Can

you, with David, say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with Thee."

SECTION XXIV.

(Chapter ix. verses 1—13.)

MOSES, as you know, was the lawgiver of Israel, and Elijah the first and foremost of the prophets. Moses died, it is true, a natural death; that is to say, he passed into heaven through the dark and shadowy valley of death. God had said unto him, "Get thee up into Mount Nebo, and die in the Mount whereunto thou goest;" and Moses went up into the mount, as the Lord had bidden him, alone, and without a witness; and neither the manner of his death, nor the place of his sepulchre, was ever known to human eye or ear. Of the departure of Elijah from this world, we are distinctly informed that he died not; that, like his predecessor Enoch, he was not, for God took him. And now we have both reappearing on this earth,—a glorious and undoubted testimony that their spirits were living, and living unto God. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; and Moses here is the type or representative of all those, now in their graves, who shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and Elijah the type of those who shall not taste of death, but which shall be alive

and remain, and shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. We might, perhaps, have asked why, of all that ever lived on earth, these two should have been selected to do honour to Jesus on this occasion. One might, perhaps, have thought that the progenitor of the human race, the first Adam, to whom the first promise had been given of a coming Saviour,—or Abraham, the father of the faithful, the friend of God, who had so often, in the days of his flesh, talked with God, and who had rejoiced to see Christ's day,—or Isaiah, the evangelical prophet, to whom had been so clearly revealed the sufferings, and that death of the Man of Sorrows which was the subject of discourse on this mount of transfiguration;—one might, perhaps, have supposed, that one or all of these might most appropriately have done homage to Jesus on this occasion, and so no doubt they might; but one sees at once how much more appropriately Moses and Elias were selected, the one the representative of the Law, the other of the Prophets. They were, too, both types of Christ: they had each alike with Christ fasted forty days: they had both been admitted to intercourse, and communicated with God on Horeb; and to both had the Lord revealed His glorious name and attributes. Christ had Himself declared that He came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets; and it had been also declared of Him that "the Spirit of Prophecy was the Testimony of Jesus," and here, on this mount, we have the

heavens, as it were, again opened at the transfiguration, as at the inauguration of Christ: and, as then the Spirit descended as a dove, and rested on the Son, and the Father's voice announced His approval of His well-beloved; so here, the heavens again open, and send down once more to earth these glorified saints, that there might be seen and recorded the glorious and gracious union of the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel. And how sweetly shadowed forth, in the latter portion of the narrative, is, not so much the superiority, as the blending, the embodying of the Law and the Prophets in Christ, all centred in Him—its types and shadows fulfilled and realized: the comparatively dim and indistinct glimpses of the law; its daily sacrifice; its Lamb without blemish; and the predictions of the prophets of the glorious advent of the root of Jesse, and the offspring of David, all accomplished, all fulfilled in Him who now stood on that mount in the manifestation of that glory which He had with the Father before the world was. There was, indeed, a cloud of suffering and of death to pass through, before all was fulfilled: that cloud was for a brief while to overshadow Him; but, even out of that cloud of apparent helplessness and abandonment, a voice should own and uphold Him as God's beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased. And as that cloud passed away, the Law and *the Prophets* had fulfilled their mission, the work

which *they* were given to do,—Moses and Elias withdraw from the scene, and Jesus alone remains, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, of whom Moses in the Law spake, and to whom gave all the prophets witness.

I do not know that, in this glorious scene, any ulterior purpose was intended to give us a glimpse of heaven and its glorious inmates. The apostle, indeed, as from his exalted height, when he was caught up into the third heaven, and had been admitted to that glorious fellowship, and heard unutterable words, gives us, in the 12th chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, a thrilling catalogue of the inmates of the New Jerusalem; and here we have two of that blessed company, not only walking, and taking sweet counsel together, but conversing with the Saviour they loved, on earth. It seems to shadow forth that precious truth, that we shall indeed know and recognise all the inmates of heaven, even those of the world's earliest days. Moses and Elias lived at far distant intervals of time; and yet they are here united in holy fellowship and purpose. Peter, and James, and John, could have no knowledge of these glorified saints; and yet they recognise them, and call them by their names; and it is the promise of the Lord Himself, that in His kingdom we shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob—an image, undoubtedly, implying recognition as well as union.

SECTION XXV.

(Chapter ix. verses 14—29.)

PETER, in his ignorance, would have remained on the mount of transfiguration, and in his selfishness would have retained the Saviour there too. But man was never meant to keep aloof, nor shut himself up, either in a tabernacle or a monastery, from the common duties of life. Claims on his love, his benevolence, and his exertion, are continually occurring; and he is most in the way of duty, whose love to Christ leads him to every scene where that love can best be shown. No sooner had Jesus, and His three followers, descended from the mount, than a practical illustration was afforded to Peter of the truth of this. Even the short period of the Saviour's absence had been attended with disquiet and disappointment, by an incident which had occurred; and well, therefore, might all the people, when they saw Him approaching, run to Him with delight, and salute Him. But why should it be added, "When they beheld Him, they were greatly amazed"? No doubt traces of that heavenly transfiguration were still visible on His features, when His face did shine as the sun, and perhaps even His garments retained somewhat of that glistering whiteness which had been so glorious on the mount. When Moses returned from similar communion with God, his face shone also;

and I believe it is true, without the need of any miracle, that when a child of God returns from more intimate communion with his Father, as there is assuredly a warmer impulse of love in his heart, so there is a glow of holy light around him, an atmosphere of heavenly fragrance diffused around, a calm and peaceful serenity, like the rich glow of sunset, that lingers so long in a western sky, that, as was said of the apostles afterwards, people took notice of them that they had been with Jesus. And yet, if this were to be the unfailing test of effectual prayer, it would be sad to think how little effectual prayer there must be in the world. To judge of the generality of people, as they retire from the house of prayer, or as they arise from their knees in their more private worship, it would be the very last thought which would enter an observer's mind, that they had been with Jesus; that they had been engaged in the most solemn intercourse that could take place between a sinner and his Saviour, a criminal and his Judge, or, rather, an erring child and his forgiving Father. It is sad to think that the world, and the world's follies, and the world's language, so instantaneously return, as almost to induce the belief that they had never left the heart; or that the very objects which pass before the eyes in prayer, so arrest the mind as to form the subject of immediate remark. And how can it be otherwise with the generality, if they carry the world's cares, and plans, and occupations with them

to the church porch? They will, in all probability, enter with them, and assuredly divide, if not altogether usurp, the heart.

I believe we may impute the cause to the same lack which marked this poor father—a deficient, feeble, and imperfect faith. You may say, and many do say, aye, and many painfully feel, who impossible it is to evoke such high and holy feelings in our own poor, worldly, wandering hearts, where every sorrow, every trial, and every care is striving for the mastery; and though, perhaps, we long, with Moses, to put off our shoes from off our feet—though, as we draw nigh the holy ground, we strive to cast off our cares and trials, and every incumbrance that would hinder our access, and leave them, for a time at least, behind us; yet they will intrude, they will come down and mar the sacrifice. And what are we to do? Just remember our Lord's counsel to this poor father: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." This is the victory that overcometh and expelleth the world, even our faith. It is faith that rolleth the burden of our cares to God, and leaves them with Him. It is faith that just simply takes God at His word. I believe it: for God says it. What a mighty privilege! what an ample prerogative is here offered to the believer! "All things are possible to him that believeth." I speak not of the faith which can remove mountains—faith as feeble as a grain *of mustard-seed* can do that, and even that faith

may be nothing worth, after all; but I mean that faith which can appropriate, as its own inalienable inheritance, all the riches of its Lord's treasure-house, so triumphantly enumerated by the apostle: "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." Oh! what a climax! like Jacob's ladder, "the top of which reached to heaven." Oh! what a basis on which for faith to rest! "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

SECTION XXVI.

(Chapter ix. verses 30—37.)

I DO not so much wonder at the disciples misunderstanding the purport of our Lord's remarks, as to His approaching sufferings, as I do at their forbearing to ask for an explanation of their difficulty. Jesus had never shown any unwillingness to explain anything to them; He had borne with their ignorance, He had forgiven their waywardness, He had enlightened their darkness. If He had at any time spoken ambiguously to the people in parables, when he was alone with His disciples He had invariably expounded their meaning to them. Nay, they had not always waited for this act of condescension on their Master's part, but had often forestalled

His purpose and His kindness by saying to Him, "Declare unto us this parable," and Jesus had ever done as they desired. When, however, He tells them here of His approaching sufferings and death, though his language certainly appears plain and intelligible enough, it is distinctly stated they understood not His saying, and yet were afraid to ask Him. I believe that up to this time, and to the very last, with all their undoubted love and attachment to the Saviour, with all their sincere and honest acknowledgment of His divine mission and character as the Messiah and the Son of God—nay, perhaps the more for that very acknowledgment—the disciples were most unwilling to admit the idea of a suffering and crucified Lord. It went so completely to the very root of all their prejudices and preconceived opinions, and so cut up all their hopes of advancement in His expected kingdom, that I can well understand how they mistook, or misunderstood, our Lord's meaning. And I think the same motive gives a clue also to the reason of their unwillingness to ask Him. None are so unwilling to receive or know the truth, as those to whom that truth would be unwelcome. I am afraid it is not confined to these apostles only; men, even now, are unwilling to place themselves under a faithful gospel ministry, lest they should be disturbed in their false peace, or lest some preconceived opinions and favourite views should be rudely shaken; and the same

feeling leads many a one to close and put away his Bible, lest it should shock or disquiet him with some unwelcome truth, or some warning that cannot be evaded. The Word of God, or the faithful minister expounding that Word, is like Paul preaching the truth to Felix, or Nathan to David—both unwelcome, and one dismissed. These disciples of our Lord evidently did not wish to be disturbed in their ambitious hopes of distinction and preferment in their Master's future kingdom, and they therefore forbore to ask any question which might shatter their airy palaces and castles. It is evident what was passing in their own minds, by the subject of their disputes on the road. It was sad indeed that so much of earth, and earth's vanities, should cleave to those who had so long been followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, and that they should have imbibed so little of their Master's mind. How deep the stain that was made by Adam's fall! how ineradicable the scar by any process but by the work of the Holy Ghost! This feeling of an earthly kingdom lingered to the very last; even after their Master's resurrection they declared that they had hoped it had been He that should have redeemed or restored the kingdom to Israel: and one of their first questions to their risen Lord, showed how quickly they own hopes had arisen too: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

It is a significant emblem which our Lord

here employs to correct the vainglorious disputes of His disciples as to precedency, and one which most pointedly expresses His abhorrence of that spirit which would lord it over God's heritage. Pride, assuredly, was never made for man, far less fallen man; but "a proud priest" is one of those anomalies which a rebellious and deeply corrupt nature alone could put together, and which grace alone can change. It is the same image which the Psalmist used to describe the change which grace had wrought in his soul, "My soul is even as a weaned child;" and though not so striking as when the living image, the breathing picture, of a child's meekness was placed before their eyes, yet, in one sense at least, it is even more expressive. The child that is weaned, once loved, once craved, the nourishment that is now denied it; and when that food on which it lived was first withdrawn, was no doubt captious, and fretful, and repining; but it is now weaned, and the weaned child no longer craves that in which it once delighted. So,

Lord! if Thou Thy grace impart,
Poor in spirit, meek in heart,
I shall, as my Master be,
Rooted in humility,
Simple, teachable, and mild,
Humble as a little child!

SECTION XXVII.

(Chapter ix. verse 38 to the end.)

WHEN our Lord took a little child, as we read last, and set him in the midst of His disciples, as an illustration of that lowliness of spirit which He would inculcate on them, He added, "Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me." The words "in My name" immediately lead the beloved disciple, John, to mention an incident which had recently occurred of one casting out devils in the name of Jesus, who was not a follower of his Master, and that himself and the other disciples had forbidden him to continue such a practice. At first sight there seems to have been some little feeling of jealousy in the matter, that one who, apparently kept aloof from them, one who perhaps, like Nicodemus, had not courage openly to avow himself a disciple, should yet exercise the same miraculous powers with themselves. It might have been a feeling of jealousy also for their Master's honour, as if one were usurping a prerogative or stealing a privilege to which he was not entitled. Our Lord's reply is not only decided, "Forbid him not," and marked by that tenderness and gracious acceptance even of the least acknowledgment of Him, which disdained not kindness shown to a child, if it were but in His name, nor repudiated a cup

of cold water only to a disciple, if in His name. But Jesus takes occasion from the incident to dwell with striking and most forcible detail on the sacrifice and self-denial which his religion required; and of the fearful peril of putting a stumbling-block or cause of offence in a brother's way.

In the case of the man casting out devils in the name of Jesus, the context evidently leads us to the conclusion, that the miracle was performed, that the evil spirit was cast out. We have an instance of a similar attempt in the Acts of the Apostles, where the sons of one Sceva, a Jew, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth." But the attempt in their case only ended in discomfiture, and it is evident that, as the narrative in the Acts tells us, they were only exorcists, or men who used curious arts of divination to practise on the unwary, and advance their own schemes. In the narrative before us the man was evidently a believer, though a secret, or at least not an avowed one. Nicodemus I have already alluded to; Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple also, but secretly for fear of the Jews, and no doubt there were others. Of one thing, however, we can entertain no doubt, that the same power which was mighty to heal the centurion's servant, though at a distance, *and the same* mercy which said to the nobleman,

"Go thy way, thy son liveth," and which communicated instant and perfect healing to the poor woman, who from behind touched but the hem of His garment, must in the present instance, also, have accompanied His name, by His own power and might compelled the evil spirit to depart, and thereby acknowledged and sanctioned the act, and accepted the service.

The lesson to ourselves ought not to be forgotten. I am afraid it is one we much need, and that we are too apt to disparage and discountenance, and, if we could, put down efforts for the cause of Christ, because they may not be exactly according to our notions of propriety, or the strict rules of the church. I should in such a case just ask what is the result? Is an evil spirit cast out? Does the name of Jesus exercise and retain power and influence on those over whom that name is called? Is Christ's kingdom extended? Is Satan's kingdom weakened? Are men roused to a sense of sin, and are they crying out in earnest conviction, "What must I do to be saved?" Then I would say in my Master's words, "No man that can do these things in Christ's name, can lightly speak evil of Him." And as our Lord's inference is, "He that is not against us, is on our side," so would I hold out the right hand of fellowship to any, be he who he may, who is, from his heart and soul, in truth and in deed, a fellow labourer in the work of Christ. It is not the amount of the effort, or the

extent of the sacrifice to which Jesus looks, it is the motive which prompts the act, and the love that sweetens the toil; and it is a blessed promise even for the feeblest labourer, that a cup of cold water, given in the name of Christ, will in no wise lose its reward. How different the estimate of the world from the estimate of Jesus! That looks to, and in fact, can only judge by, the outward act; the Saviour looks to "the hidden man of the heart;" and oh! what a vast amount of labour, and zeal, and love for Christ, unknown and unrecognised, and perhaps, in many an instance, rebuked and depreciated by man, will the last day reveal and reward. May we be found among those who labour for love's sake!

SECTION XXVIII.

(Chapter x. verses 1—16.)

It is sad to think how sin, like a stream that has overflowed and burst its banks, has scattered ruin and desolation over all that God once pronounced so fair and good; that not one tie, however holy or however close, but has been, and is continually liable to be, torn asunder by sin; and what God in His mercy meant for man's good, has been by man's sin too often rendered an occasion of sorrow, and an instrument of ruin. There is not, perhaps, a tie closer or more endeared, *than* that between a mother and the babe

of her bosom; and yet the Lord is introduced as asking by His prophet, "Can a mother forget her sucking child?" and the answer, sad and unnatural as it is, was, "Yea, they may forget." So here, in the first portion of this chapter we find how completely sin has poisoned the very source and well-head of domestic peace and purity; how an union, "instituted of God in the time of man's innocency," has been perverted and distorted by human passions into the most fruitful source of dissension, bitterness, and guilt; and how completely the distinguishing characteristic of its indissoluble nature has been obliterated by human depravity, and those whom God had declared should never be separated, man, in his impiety and folly, permitted every caprice of passion, every impulse of ambition, interest, or even of temper, to tear asunder without scruple or remorse. How sadly, and painfully too, has the sin of man in this matter perverted and lost sight of that beautiful and touching mystery under which the Lord has been pleased to represent the union betwixt Himself and His church, and the undying love He has borne, and still bears to it, and of which love what a costly proof he gave, in giving himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it, and present it unto Himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing! It is indeed a mystery that the Lord of Hosts should have condescended to select this earthly

union as the one great characteristic and representation of His own love for sinners. Had God dealt with His spouse, the church, as man in his guilt and folly too often does with those to whom God has bound him, what would have become of the church? And yet, how manifold her provocations, how early her departure from God! Even in Paradise that church was united to her Lord, and even in Paradise we may truly say she forgot the covenant engagement of her youth. With what tenderness is the Lord, as a man, represented as remembering the early love of Israel! "Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals;" and yet, with what touching sorrow, with what almost heart-broken repetition, does He cry after her, "Yet return again to Me, saith the Lord,"—"Turn again, ye backsliding children, for I am married unto you"! Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? It is the church, the church of Christ, forgiven, restored, cleansed, adorned, "her clothing of wrought gold, all glorious within," "holy and without blemish." Truly may the Spirit of God say of the love of Christ, "Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it."

I do not know that there is any significancy in the immediate connection of the next few verses, where is so sweetly depicted the love of *Christ to* children, and yet it seems to me to

speak very significantly; it seems to say, "You see how sin can separate and rend the closest and holiest ties, yet, in My love and care, I have, as it were, placed an additional fence to guard, another link to unite, another bond to heighten the endearments even of wedded love. Bring these children, the gifts of My love, and the pledges of your own, bring them to Me, consecrate them from their earliest hours to the Saviour who has so loved you and them; train them, nurse them for Me; and in that sweetest of all duties, in that gushing forth of the heart's purest and tenderest affections, when ye mingle their names in prayer, you will find the best pledge of your own happiness, and the truest security against unkindness and disunion." The passage, however, suggests one important caution, that there must be unity of purpose in bringing them to Christ. It would be a sad marring of the Lord's mercies, for one parent to seek to bring them, and the other to forbid it; for one to wish to train them for the Lord, and the other for the world. In this duty most especially is the Apostle's caution needed, "Be not ye unequally yoked together."

SECTION XXIX.

(Chapter x. verses 17—31.)

WE have here, in almost similar words to those used by St. Matthew, the narrative of the rich young man who came to Jesus to ask the way to eternal life, and who, when he was told, went away sorrowful, and refused to walk in it. It may have often, perhaps, suggested itself to some, that our Lord here proposes to this young man a very high and somewhat unattainable standard, "Sell all, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor;" and that, if such a proposition were made to other wealthy young men, it would prove a great stumbling-block to the generality. Let us, then, examine this point;—for, though in the present day it is not probable that such a proposal would ever be made to any, yet the principle it involves is ever the same, and whether a man retains or parts with his possessions, or whether he has or has not possessions to part with or retain, that principle must be the prevailing motive of his heart. We must remember, however, at the very outset, that the proposition here made by Jesus was not the condition on which eternal life was to be purchased; that heaven was not, as it were, set to sale, and that this young man refused to be the purchaser. That would have made the whole *transaction* a mere matter of bargain; and

though we might consider the young man as declining what we know would have been a most valuable bargain for himself, yet we should hardly be entitled to censure him for what might have been an error of judgment only. But how different the case, and how different the feelings which influenced him! This young man was evidently most deeply impressed with the importance of the question he proposed to Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" not, that I may entitle myself, but that I may receive it as an inheritance from the hands of a gracious Father. He came running, as if his errand brooked no delay, as if he grudged a single moment that would intervene between so gracious a hope and its fulfilment. He kneeled to Jesus in token of his reverence for His character, and as if to testify his ready acquiescence in, and acceptance of, the directions He might receive. His address is respectful and reverential: "Good master," though in all probability he meant no more than the usual courteous salutation from a disciple to his master. Our Lord, however, would lead him to a closer insight into His own character and claims, not only as a teacher sent from God, but as one laying claim to divinity itself. He asks, "Why callest thou Me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." The inference, then, from your own words, is, "Thou callest *Me* good, there is *only one* good, that is, God; if, then, I am that good One, I am God

also." How natural, then, the deduction, "If I be God, then thine own law, which thou sayest thou hast kept from thy youth up, teacheth thee, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself. Test, then, thy faith in Me as God, thy love to Me as God, as well as thy love to thy neighbour. Dost thou love Me above all things? Art thou ready to part with all, with whatsoever may be a hinderance in thy heavenly course? Do this; be ready to take up that cross of sorrow, and shame, and suffering, which every follower of Mine must bear, and I declare unto thee, on the word of Him who cannot lie, thou shalt have treasure in heaven." Was this an unreasonable demand? did none ever yield to it? Were there none in the early days of Christianity, who, possessors both of lands and houses, sold them, and brought the prices, and laid them at the apostles' feet? Was there no Barnabas, who did the same, and became the zealous and devoted missionary and companion of Paul? Was there no Paul himself, who "counted all things but dung so that he might win Christ"? Were there none converted from divination to the faith in Christ, who burned their books of "curious arts" in the sight of all men, though at the cost of fifty thousand pieces of silver? Were there none who "took joyfully the spoiling of their *goods*" *for* Christ's sake, and for the very

promise sake, which Jesus here gives, "knowing that they had in heaven a better and more enduring substance"? It was, then, no unattainable standard, it was no sacrifice beyond the reach of love, beyond the aim of faith, a sacrifice for a world to wonder at. And, had this young man joined that "noble army," he would now be in possession of that treasure in heaven which he then rejected. Well might he go away sorrowful, for, as has been well observed, "None have so sad a parting with Christ, as those that go half-way with Him."

SECTION XXX.

(Chapter x. verses 32—35.)

THERE are two feelings here predicated of the apostles: they were "amazed," and they were "afraid." Both were very natural, under the circumstances, though, the latter especially, not very creditable to themselves. Jesus was now on His last journey to Jerusalem, that sad and melancholy journey which was to issue in all that detail of shame and suffering which is here given by St. Mark with a more painful minuteness than by any other evangelist, and which was so accurately fulfilled to the very letter. And yet going, as He knew He was, like a lamb to the slaughter, the evangelist here represents Him as pressing onwards, before them all, as if He were feeling, in

all its reality and strength, that desire He once expressed, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?" Well might the apostles be "amazed" at the eagerness with which their Master pressed onwards to death; and though many a one amongst them in after years felt, if not the same eagerness, at least the same willingness to tread in their Master's steps, and one, though not now, yet hereafter to be enrolled among them, declared for himself, what was no doubt the feeling of all, "I am ready, not to be bound only, but to die also at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus," yet at this time they were "amazed" at what they could not but consider their Lord's temerity; and as for themselves, as they followed slowly and reluctantly, "they were afraid" lest they should be involved in the same dangers with their Master. We are told that we know not what a day may bring forth, the change that even a few passing hours may work in every feeling; but how little do we know of the change that years work in us; how little does any one know or dream of that mighty change which is wrought in the heart of man by the work of the Holy Spirit of God, when that which we once hated, we love, and what we once loved, we loathe, and the whole current of our affections, desires, and pursuits is changed and diverted into a new channel, and what was once dreaded, is now calmly, *and, it may be,* joyfully awaited.

As these poor, timid, trembling disciples were thus slowly and unwillingly following their Master's steps in His progress to Jerusalem, suppose for a moment that Jesus had stopped by the way and said, "I have told you of all that I, your Lord and Master, am to undergo. I have described the enemies, even now thirsting for My blood, the cruel chief priests and scribes. I have enumerated, one by one, each indignity as it shall fall upon Me,—the mocking, the scourging, the spitting, and the death; but the servant is not greater than his Master. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more they of His household? If they spare not Me, will they spare you? Shall I now draw the veil aside, and show to each of you the martyrdom that awaits you? Shall I begin with thee, James, thou son of Zebedee? Thou art the leader of "that noble army of martyrs," thy blood, the first of those before Me, that shall be shed, and at no distant day! Or shall I show thee, Simon, son of Jonas, like thy Master, nailed to the cross, but in thy humility deeming even that death too honourable? Or thee, whom I have permitted to bear the appellation of the disciple whom I loved—shall I exhibit to thy sight that boiling caldron, into which a cruel tyrant shall plunge thee? but when thou passest through it, I will be with thee."—Suppose, I say, that their Lord had thus addressed His followers, and shown to them, one by one, their

future toils, and sufferings, and death, they might not only, indeed, have been "afraid," but they might, perhaps, have shrunk in terror from their Master's side. "As thy day, so shall thy strength be," is God's gracious promise. They needed not then the martyr's strength, for the martyr's trials were not yet come. It has been well said, "Dying grace for a dying time;" and these followers of Jesus then found, as every follower in every age to the end of time will find, that as each trial and each emergency arose, so grace to grace, and strength to strength, were vouchsafed, till "the head-stone is brought forth with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace to it."

SECTION XXXI.

(Chapter x. verses 35—45.)

THIS ill-advised petition of the two brothers, James and John, may lead us to some very profitable reflections on the subject of *sinful prayer*. The association of two such words may perhaps startle; and one might almost be inclined to exclaim, "What! can prayer be sinful? It may be sinful *not* to pray; but can it ever be sinful to pray?" That is not, perhaps, the right way to put the question. It may not be sinful to pray. The mere act may not be sin, but there may be a great deal of sin in the prayer. There *was* in the prayer of these two brothers. There was igno-

rance: they knew not what they asked. There was pride, and vain glory, and ambition. There was a jealous envy of their brethren, and a desire to be before them in the race of worldly preferment; and if we add, the moment which they selected to prefer their request, at the very time when Jesus had been so painfully recapitulating His approaching sufferings and death, we can hardly crowd into the brief compass of so short a prayer so much that was selfish and sinful, as when these two brothers made their petition, that they might sit, the one on the right hand, and the other on the left of their Lord in His kingdom. And is there, then, no sin in prayer? no danger of speaking unadvisedly with our lips to God, as well as to man? David, speaking prophetically of Judas, in the 109th Psalm, says, "His prayer shall be turned into sin;" and we read elsewhere of those "whose prayer shall be an abomination." Does not our Lord speak of those who, in His day, for a pretence made long prayers, and who should therefore receive greater damnation; and we have on record a specimen of most sinful prayer in the parable of the Pharisee. I do not now speak of what is assuredly great sin—of uttering with our lips what we regard not in our hearts; of the carelessness, indifference, and even levity which so frequently characterize our manner in prayer. All this is no doubt most aggravated and sinful contempt of God, taking His name in vain, and casting

His ordinances behind our back. But this is not the point to which we are directed here, which is sin in our prayer, in the matter, the subject of our prayer, what we ask for, as well as the manner and the spirit in which we pray. We as often ask amiss in the matter as in the manner. This prayer of the brothers is solely for worldly and temporal objects. Are we not, then, to make these the subjects of our prayer? Most assuredly we are, though in due subordination. "Give us this day our daily bread," is one of the petitions which the Lord Himself taught us; and Jacob prayed for "bread to eat, and raiment to put on." "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter," is another from the same source. Zacharias prayed for a son, and God answered that prayer by a special messenger from His own presence. Hannah, in like manner, prayed for a similar blessing; and Agur prayed for worldly competency. With regard, indeed, to spiritual blessings, I do not think we can ask amiss, whatever be the amount we ask. We cannot come up, in this matter, to God's measure, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" and the grateful acknowledgment of our church is, that God loves, and is wont to give, more than we can ask. And so, with regard to temporal matters, I would not discourage any one from taking even the pettiest cares before God, and certainly not to wrong God by thinking that any care, however humble, is beneath His notice. A very slight care may prove

a heavy burden and a grievous hinderance; and we are not to doubt or distrust the special Providence by supposing Him indifferent to the humblest care of His feeblest child. When He tells us that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, it is not to intimate a literal fact, which could be neither consolation nor encouragement to us, but it is to tell us that God takes notice even of a thing so insignificant as a hair of our head. When He tells us that not a sparrow falls to the ground without His permission, it is to intimate that nothing that befals a child of His is beneath His cognizance or unworthy His direction. There must be, however, one limitation to every earthly prayer, and that is, that it be for God's glory, as well as our real good. As far as we are concerned, we have very feeble, limited conceptions either of God or ourselves; and therefore in all our prayers we must rest unconditionally on the Lord's will and wisdom to grant or to withhold what He sees best for ourselves, and most conducive to His own holy and beneficent purposes. It was the very limitation which Jesus affixed to His own prayer, "Not My will, but Thine;" "If Thou be willing;" "If it seem good to Thee." And is that any curtailment of prayer, any diminution of its blessedness? Every child knows and can testify that it is

> Sweet in the confidence of faith,
> To trust His firm decrees:
> Sweet to lie passive in His hand,
> And know no will but His.

SECTION XXXII.

(Chapter x. verse 46 to the end.)

THERE are many crumbs to be gathered up even from this humble incident and brief narrative. A blind beggar by the way-side, as Jesus passed by, earnestly besought His aid; and Jesus, compassionating his case, healed him. The first crumb picked up is the lesson taught us, that there is no case so lowly as to be beneath the notice and regard of the Saviour of mankind. What so apparently mean and humble as a poor beggar, sitting by the way side, and begging of every passer-by? He was indeed blind, as well as poor; but many a Jewish traveller, I suspect, passed him unheeded, or if they threw him an alms, it was with a feeling of contemptuous indifference. But now another traveller approaches, and hearing the unusual tread of numbers, the beggar asks who the stranger was. He is told, "Jesus of Nazareth." But Nazareth was no name of reproach to him. He had heard of and knew that good *could* come out of Nazareth. He had heard of the "wonderful cures" performed by this man of Nazareth, how the blind had received their sight, and the lame had walked at His word; how lepers had been cleansed, and the deaf had heard, and even the dead been raised up at His bidding. He might have heard of the taunt "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" "Out of Galilee

ariseth no prophet." But he had also heard that there should "come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse;" and therefore, with unhesitating faith, at once addressing Jesus as the promised Son of David, he cries out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." There were those who would have kept him from the Saviour, who would have repulsed and thrust him away. "Trouble not the Master. What! one so mean as thou—a beggar like thou intrude on the Master's presence! Stand back." But faith was too strong for repulse, the necessity of his case too urgent, and if he lost that opportunity of Jesus passing by—if he sought not the Lord while He might be found, if he called not upon Him while He was near, the time for mercy might pass away to return no more. He therefore "cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Did any ever cry unto the Lord in vain; did any poor destitute ever look to Jesus for help and was repulsed, and bidden to stand aside? Never. The beggar on the dunghill, Lazarus at the rich man's gate, covered with sores, the unclean leper, as He descended from the mount, the unhappy maniac of Gadara, and now Bartimæus begging by the wayside to Jericho, can alike testify to the love and tender compassion of the Lord. Jesus was hastening onwards; He was most eager to accomplish that journey; He was straitened in His spirit till He had accomplished all His Father's will at Jerusalem, yet that will

was not hindered by an act of mercy, that purpose was not forestalled, nay it was promoted by the very act which called another sufferer, another sinner to Himself. Jesus stands still, and bids them lead the blind beggar to Him. Oh! gracious rebuke to those that would have repulsed him! Oh! call and summons of unutterable mercy to him that was in need! And he, throwing aside everything that would have hindered or entangled his steps, hastened to the Saviour's call, and received the reward of his faith in the recovery of his sight; and he who but a few minutes before had been sitting by that wayside in his loneliness and destitution, is now amid the followers of Jesus, no doubt praising and glorifying God for the great things He had done to him. Now, of whom is this blind beggar the representative? Of a poor sinner, awakened to a sense of his need, conscious that he is in blindness, and groping his way in darkness, or sitting helplessly by the way-side with none to help him, with no man to care for his soul. He hears of Jesus as the sinner's friend, the Saviour of the lost, the needy, and the miserable; he is told of the wondrous cures performed by Him—how the leprosy of sin has been cleansed, how the spiritually blind have been enlightened, how the deafened ear and heart have heard a voice saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it;" how the dead in trespasses and sins have been raised; how His *blood cleanseth* from all sin; and, in the strong

agony of a sinner's broken heart, he cries, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me! God be merciful to me a sinner!" But as he cries, there is one ready to repulse, and bid him hold his peace. There is Satan, in his malice suggesting, "What! you, so vile a sinner! Stand back: Jesus will never hold parley with one so unclean as you." "Remember Bartimæus!" he cried the more a great deal, "Have mercy on me!" Nor was he disappointed of his hope. Jesus said unto him, "Go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee." And, remember also, where that "*way*" led him; "he followed Jesus in the way."

SECTION XXXIII.

(Chapter xi. verses 1—11.)

It is not recorded by St. Mark, that our Lord had any ulterior purpose, in thus entering Jerusalem, in a kind of triumphant procession: but we know that it was done, in order that that might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet Zechariah, "Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek and lowly, riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." There was also another purpose, a purpose of considerate love, and kindness in the mind of Jesus in giving these directions to two of His disciples, and that purpose was, now that He was so soon to be taken from them, to confirm their confidence, and unwavering reliance on

all that He had said, and promised. And no doubt the accuracy with which these minute particulars were all fulfilled to the very letter must have tended to impress on their minds, the conviction that their Master had a knowledge beyond that of man, that He was about their path, and guided them in every step. Jesus was far away from the village, to which He had directed His disciples to proceed. He had no communication with any one, He probably knew no one in it: and yet He bids His disciples go, not to seek for what He needed, not to inquire and endeavour to procure, or hire the animal He wanted, but He directs them to the very spot where it would be found, to a particular place, most accurately marked out, "where two roads met," and there should they find the animal fastened to a door without. And not only does He describe all this, but He proceeds to state that the owners of the colt would interfere, and that they had only to declare that the Lord had need of it, when all opposition would cease, and they would forthwith send the animal. Nor was this all, for there was to be a particularity in the animal, that seemed almost to court failure; but it was no unmeaning particularity, that it should be a colt whereon never man had sat, for that was the identical fact, which the prophet more than five hundred years before had declared should be the case: an accuracy of *foreknowledge* and fulfilment which can only

be explained by the fact, that the same Spirit which spake by the prophet, spake now by the mouth of Jesus.

And though, as I have said, all this must have tended in its results to have led the minds of the disciples to rest in as calm quietness and assurance on an absent as on a present Lord, it is very far from having no lesson to teach ourselves. For myself, I love to trace the footsteps of Jesus in every path, to recognise His directions in every circumstance, and to anticipate the fulfilment of His will concerning me in every event that shall befall me. And if one reads so accurately in this narrative the special providence of the Lord in the minutest and apparently most insignificant details of human life, one can read as striking a lesson of obedient duty and unhesitating compliance with what we know to be the Lord's will in the conduct of these two disciples. There might have been much to disincline them to this service, they might have raised many an apparently well-grounded objection, they might have proposed a more feasible and far easier plan, and protested that it arose from zeal for their Master's honour: but there is nothing of the kind, the heart and the feet are alike willing to walk in the path of their Lord's commandments. And in this respect duty and obedience have the same characteristic as faith; they alike take God at His word. Hath He said, and shall I not do it? Do I read His will in any duty however irksome,

do I recognise His hand beckoning me in any path however rugged, or appointing me any trial however painful, then we must take God at His word, and not suffer our carnal reasonings, our feeble sense, our imperfect vision, our love of ease, or our shrinking from duty, to bandy words and arguments with the Lord, in evasion of any duty or burden He gives us to do or bear. "Lord! what wilt Thou have me to do," was Saul's instant reply to the Lord's call, and we know what the Lord required him to do, and suffer, and if we would follow the Lord fully, we must add to Saul's unhesitating inquiry David's ready and instant compliance and obedience, "Seek ye My face—Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

SECTION XXXIV.

(Chapter xi. verses 12—26.)

We read in the book of Numbers, that when the Lord gave orders to Moses that each one of the heads of the twelve tribes should give to him his rod or staff, and that he was to lay them before the Lord, and that whom the Lord should choose, his rod should be found with blossoms upon it, Moses did according as he was commanded, and on the morning of the next day, on inspecting the various rods, Aaron's rod, as head or representative of the tribe of Levi, was found, not only to have produced buds, but to

have bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds, all the growth of one night, and that too on a sapless, dried staff, without principle of life or vegetation within it. Can there be a more lively and impressive image of a dead sinner, a sinner dead in trespasses and sins, than this dry stick of Aaron's, or a more striking representation of the power and energy of the Holy Spirit of God on the more than torpid, slumbering soul, suddenly awaking to life and vigour and bloom and fruit than this instantaneous revivifying of Aaron's rod, and its putting forth at once buds and blossoms and fruit: a beautiful emblem of the fruit-bearing Christian in his vital union with the Saviour! How different the scene represented in this portion of Scripture! Here was a tree, still growing, still suffered to grow, with many a sign of life about it, but, with all its apparent growth and vigour, with no fruit, having a name to live, but in reality dead. The same power that bade the dry and sapless rod sprout forth into buds, and blossoms and fruit, said also to the barren fig-tree, "Let no one gather fruit on thee henceforth for ever," and as the one, like the heaving amid the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision instantly felt a life-recalling power, so the other as instantly felt the withering influence of the same Almighty will, and exhibited on the following morning as striking, but more fearful evidence that the Lord's words will never return unto Him void, but will as signally fulfil

His threatenings, as it will realize all His promises. And yet this tree apparently exhibited no difference from other trees around; it had to a certain extent a degree of ornament in its foliage, of beauty and freshness in its verdure, and it may be even of shade and shelter beneath its boughs, and from the mere hasty or casual passer-by might have drawn forth an expression of admiration and approval. And how often is this the case in the world. The wicked for a season may be seen spreading like the green bay tree, they may be in great power, there may be much of ornament and splendour around, and many may find shelter and protection under their patronage, and many a casual looker-on may admire and perhaps envy: but there is "a root of bitterness springing up to trouble them," and the same Being who said to this fig-tree, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever," has said also, "Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." There were so many in our Lord's time, and there have been so many ever since, content with the profession of the lips, with the semblance of the outward service, with a few useless profitless leaves of surface-duties, that not only bring no fruit to perfection, but have none that they can bring. Leaves, you know, are not the germ of the bud, the blossom or the fruit; they spring from another and a deeper source; and so Christian fruit, the graces of holiness, humility, comformity

to the image of Christ and the doing all to the glory of God, can only spring from that inward source, and a heart touched and softened and moulded and wrought upon by the Holy Spirit. It is true, the same dews and the same sun-shine that nurture the buds and the blossoms, nurture the leaves also, and both may grow together, deriving nourishment from the same source; and so the outward duties, the visible life and conversation of a child of God, are nourished from the same source as the hidden life, and they too both grow together to the glory of God. I think too we may derive a lesson even from the position in which Jesus found this fig-tree. It was growing on the road-side, no culture had probably been bestowed upon it, it may have been left untended, unpruned, and suffered to run altogether to waste: yet even from it Jesus expected fruit, He came looking for fruit; and so from the most unpromising, and, humanly speaking, most neglected being, God expects fruit; in no man's life will He be content with leaves only, and He declares even of the heathen world that they are without excuse.

SECTION XXXV.

(Chapter xi. verse 27 to the end.)

We have a striking instance here that what is innocent, and may be even praiseworthy in

itself, becomes sinful from the motives from which it proceeds. Now we have not the means of judging another's heart, that is the prerogative of God alone; and as we do not and cannot see all the springs which influence his conduct, it is well for us to follow the rule of Christian charity, and think no evil of any one. Had we for instance been walking on the day in question amid the cloisters or covered piazzas in the courts of the Temple, and seen this band of apparently holy and reverend men, the chief priests, and the scribes and the elders come to Jesus, with deference, if not reverence in their manner, and ask Him "By what authority doest Thou these things, and who gave Thee this authority to do these things?" knowing nothing of the malice that was in their hearts, and looking only to the outward demeanour of the men, and the words of the inquiry itself, we should have been justified in ascribing their inquiry to a praiseworthy and honourable motive. They were the appointed teachers of the people, and the expounders of the Law, and it was their duty, no doubt, to inquire into the pretensions and authority of any one, who claimed to exercise such control and influence over the people as Jesus had done. I should say that a minister of the present day would neglect a bounden duty to the people over whom he was set in charge, if he did not inquire, and make searching investigation *into the* character, and teaching, and doctrine of

any one who came among his flock, professing to teach and to guide them. The inquiry then here in itself was natural, was justifiable, and no more than they might have considered it their bounden duty to make. And yet we know that it was sin in them. Why then was that sin in them, which in itself was innocent and justifiable and a bounden duty? Because the Lord, who searcheth and knoweth the heart, has disclosed and left on record the malice with which they acted —that their inquiry was not for truth, nor even for controversy, but from the rankling jealousy and enmity of their hearts. We have even the secret reasoning of their hearts among themselves, reasonings which they never would have disclosed to the world, but would have kept secret in the very depths of those hearts. The Spirit of God has evidently left this communing among themselves on record, that we might be left in no mistake as to their motives and their purpose. The ministry of Jesus had now been in full exercise for three years, they had heard and seen and known enough to convince them of the divine power by which He acted, of the mission which He claimed, and the authority by which He acted. They had on other occasions demanded a sign, and He had refused to give them one; they had sent their own officers to question Him, and those officers had brought back their testimony that never man spake like this man. They therefore wanted no further knowledge, but they

did want, and they did expect, that Jesus would assert His right and authority as being the Son of God, and then they would at once have impeached Him for blasphemy. I do not know whether any of these priests and scribes were afterwards converted to the faith of Christ; but we are told that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith," and it is therefore more than probable that many even of these were in that "great company." And if any were among the disciples in after years, they may have read, and no doubt did read the gospel of Matthew, and we can well imagine with what surprise and shame and remorse they would see the wicked and evasive reasonings of their hearts, all laid bare and recorded to their confusion. But be this as it may, we know that a book of record is kept, in which the thoughts of our hearts are all faithfully registered and will one day be produced. Many a privilege of Christian ministry and fellowship will be found then to have been as utterly neglected and evaded as that of John had been by these scribes and priests. It will be a very solemn question in the day of judgment, What think you of the minister to whose teaching and instruction I confided you? Did he show unto you the way of salvation? did he deliver the truth as it is in Jesus? Was he instant in season and out of season to warn, to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine? Why then did you not believe him? "He therefore that despiseth, *despiseth not* man but God, who also hath given

unto us His Holy Spirit." It is not the hearers and despisers of John alone who will shrink from the inquiry in that day; and yet why do I speak of John, or Jonas? "Behold a greater than Jonas is here." It is a fearful sentence, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish."

SECTION XXXVI.

(Chapter xii. verses 1—12.)

THE literal and primary meaning of this parable, as it refers to the Jewish nation, is so evident, that one hardly wonders that those to whom the Lord spake it, both understood and resented its application. One can trace its truth historically, through all the annals and records of the Jewish history, and, within but a few hours, the very listeners in their blind infatuation would complete the catalogue of crime by killing the heir and casting him out of the vineyard. There are few, I believe, who on reading this parable do not exclaim against the hardened ingratitude of this Jewish people, who made such base returns for all the mercies that God had shown them, and the distinguishing favours He had vouchsafed to them, from the day that He first brought this vine out of Egypt, drove out the heathen, and planted it in their stead, to the very moment when, in His overflowing love, and unwillingness to give them up till He had tried

every means, He is represented in this parable as having yet one Son, His well-beloved, and determining to send Him, as His last effort, saying "They will reverence My Son." But let us bring the matter home to ourselves. We are each one of us the Lord's vineyard, the soul of every man is a vineyard of the Lord of Hosts, which He has planted for Himself; and which, in this Christian land at least, He has hedged in with all the barriers and fences of education, parental instruction and control, and Christian ministry. He has digged about it, and dunged it, He has built, as it were, a watch-tower, and sentinels are ranged at every out-post and avenue to warn the unwary, and give notice of the coming foe: and He has, finally, let it out each one to its own occupant. Every living being is in this respect a tenant of the Lord's, he holds his vineyard by the tenure of the Lord's will, and the charge to each one is, "Occupy, till I come." And remember the Lord expects to receive of the fruit of His vineyard: as in the parable, "at the season He sent to the husbandmen to receive of the fruit of His vineyard," so He sends to us and demands a similar return. But what is this season at which He sends? The season is always; He may not always demand it, but He expects it to be always ready and forthcoming. He may leave the arrears long uncalled for, but the debt is still accumulating. He expects fruit in childhood, *the fruit* peculiar to childhood; He expects fruit

in youth, fruit in manhood, and fruit in old age; nay more, He expects fruit every day: fruit from the child in the family; fruit from the master and the mistress, from the servant and the labourer: and, without specifying every particular fruit that God requires from each, it may be said that He calls on each and all faithfully to do their duty in that station, to which it has pleased God to call them, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God; and certainly, as regards ourselves, God may well ask of us, "What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? I have given you Christian parents, Christian education, Christian friends; I have given you the privilege of prayer, of coming to Me for counsel and guidance, in every trial, temptation and emergency; I have promised the gift of My Holy Spirit to every one that asketh Me, and I have made you members of a Christian household, where you are reminded and exhorted every day to remember and regard these things." I have said that God does not demand the fruit of His vineyard every day, but that He expects it every day, and registers every day's produce; and it is sad to think how many days He may have come, seeking fruit and receiving none. We may not, it is true, have added outrage to His messengers as these husbandmen did, but to despise their message, to turn away from their errand of love, not to

esteem them highly, for their work's sake, and to send them away empty, is insult to God, and wrong to them.

In one respect, at least, the Lord of the vineyard tells us the fruit He expects at our hands: "They will reverence My Son." Does he who denies the divinity of Jesus, "reverence the Son," God's co-equal Son? Does he who goes to human intercessors, and the saints of Rome's calendar, and who expunges the name of Jesus to place the name of Mary in its stead—does he reverence the Son? Does he who desires and consents to be in bondage to the weak and beggarly elements of man's device, "reverence the Son?" or he who ascribes to poor sinful man the power to forgive sin, from which the blood of Jesus alone cleanseth, does he, "reverence the Son?" Alas, in how many ways may Christ be, and is dishonoured! It is a valuable saying of St. Augustine, that "he loves not Christ at all, who does not love Christ above all." It was a sad reproach brought against Israel, "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself."—Fruitful in one sense, yet empty in the sight of God.

SECTION XXXVII.

(Chapter xii., verses 13—17.)

THIS ensnaring question of the Pharisees and Herodians, has already met us almost word for

word in the preceding gospel, and I need not therefore dwell on the nature of the question proposed, and how it seemed to these interrogators to involve a perplexity and difficulty from which they hoped Jesus would find it impossible to extricate Himself. I would rather now deduce one or two more general lessons, which seem to arise out of the incident itself. And the first remark I would make, is on the necessity it suggests of setting a watch over our lips, that we offend not in our tongue.

In what a variety of ways do the sin and wickedness of the heart prompt to offence and sin with the tongue! Just look at these men, whose malice and enmity against Jesus led them to put to Him this ensnaring question. No doubt it was planned and conceived with all the cunning that ingenuity and hatred could devise. And yet we may truly say, that in the same net which they laid privily is their own foot taken. In attempting to ensnare Jesus, they were themselves entangled and caught. "Master! we know that Thou art true, and teachest the Word of God in truth," is their declaration. There was either falsehood or truth, hypocrisy or sincerity in their words, and whether they said what they knew to be true, or uttered what they felt to be false, in either case, in either dilemma there was equal sin. If they gave utterance to what they felt was true, if in their hearts and consciences they knew and believed Jesus to be Him-

self true, and to teach the way of God in truth, why did they go about to kill Him, why were they at this moment trying to ensnare Him to His ruin; and why within a few hours accomplish their hellish purpose, bringing forward and perverting to a lie this very conversation as one of their charges against Him, as forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar? If they uttered what they felt to be untrue and to have no foundation in reality, then were they coming with a lie in their right hand, and Satan had filled their hearts to lie, not unto man, but unto God. How very appropriate is that instruction in our Church Catechism, when you are asked, What is your duty to your neighbour? and the reply is, among other things, "To bear no malice nor hatred in my heart, and to keep my tongue from evil-speaking and slandering!" In the case of these Pharisees and Herodians it was of deliberate malice and wickedness, and we may truly say of their speech, that it was "set on fire of hell," but it is not necessary that it should proceed from so dark and deep a source to characterize it as sinful, and I would in much earnestness press on you to "set a watch over the door of your lips," lest in folly, if not in malice, you put a stumbling-block in a brother's way. I do not know a more unamiable, and assuredly a more unchristian act, than to lead another on by ensnaring questions, to commit himself either to sin or to folly in his replies, that he may be a source of ridicule and jest to those around. And

yet how common, especially among the young, to irritate a brother into anger that the by-standers may derive a source of merriment!

I would remark also that our Lord's reply is a beautiful illustration of another answer in our Church Catechism, when the question is asked, "What dost thou chiefly learn by these commandments?" the answer is, "I learn two things, my duty towards God, and my duty towards my neighbour;" and so here Jesus sums up His condensed rule of duty in "rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's," blending the two in one harmonious union, the one resulting from the other as naturally as the stream from its fountain-head or source, so that he who loves God will of necessity love his brother also. I would look upon "Cæsar" here as comprising all the duties we owe to our fellow-men, from the highest to the lowest; "tribute to whom tribute, honour to whom honour," courtesy to whom courtesy, and love to all; "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love;" if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." Now, all these are gospel duties, gospel graces, and yet many of them may be performed from other and far lower motives, and without reference to God; and then the union of the two things, which our Lord has here joined together, will be as effectually rent asunder, as if they were altogether left undone. If we render not to Cæsar, or our neighbour, the

things that be his, we are assuredly not rendering to God the things that be His, for He that bade us love God above all things, bade us also love our neighbour as ourselves; and so, if we do render to our neighbour the things that be his, but without reference to God, and for our own lower ends, we are equally withholding from God the things that be His, and which He claims at our hands.

SECTION XXXVIII.

(Chapter xii. verses 18—28.)

I CANNOT understand why any should be found to undervalue the Old Testament, when we see our Lord not only here, but in every part of His ministry, during His life, and at the moment of death, adopting and using its inspired language as the channel of His own feelings. It may indeed be said, that if He quoted the Scriptures at all, He had no other to which He could have recourse, that the New Testament was unwritten when our Saviour lived, and that He could not quote from that which had no existence. It is of course quite true that this was the case, but it does not in the slightest degree trench upon or diminish the value and authority which our Lord's practice and sanction have given to the pages of the Old Testament. If Jesus from the very commencement of His ministry down to its close referred to and appealed to the Scriptures of the

Old Testament for testimonies to His truth and confirmations of His doctrine; if it was to them that He had recourse for weapons wherewith to repel the fiery darts of the wicked one in the season of temptation in the wilderness; if it was from them and the language of its pages that he drew forth language expressive of His agonies on the cross, and in their words committed His departing Spirit unto His Father's hands, He has at least given a sanction to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which no follower of Jesus would be inclined to doubt or depreciate. But our Lord has gone further than this in the passage of Scripture we have just read. He has drawn from that same older Testament, and from its earliest portions, the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses, the most conclusive argument for a most important doctrine of the Christian dispensation, that of the resurrection. It was so triumphant an answer that not a word was uttered in reply, not an objection started in refutation, and more than that, these very Sadducees who put forward the question in the vain-glorious confidence that they had entangled Jesus in their sophistry, durst ask Him no more questions, and retired discomfited, if not abashed, from the discussion.

It is a very serious question with which our Lord here prefaces His reply, "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures?" Nor is it only the ignorance, but the perversion of

them to which our Lord alludes. These Sadducees were probably well-enough read in the portion of Scripture which they received, but they read it carelessly or presumptuously, and more from a desire to extract matter of cavil from it, than to find and apply the truth. And yet how common is it for ignorant, presumptuous, fallible reason to measure the word of God by its own limited and narrow standard. It has been quaintly said that God can make a straight stroke with a crooked stick, and it was so assuredly in the present instance, when from such captious scepticism He educed two such valuable and instructive truths; but though God can do this, man must not attempt the same with the crooked stick of his own understanding. The distortion of the fall is still traceable on all that man attempts. And yet in the present day it is the very thing which miscalled but vaunted Rationalism is so perilously attempting to do, to bring Scripture down to the level of its own finite intellect, and to repudiate what is simply above and beyond it, as if it were opposed and contrary to their reason. "I find," says one, "in the Bible depths where elephants may swim, and shallows where lambs may wade," but we may be assured that all the essential truths and doctrines of the Gospel are in the shallows, and that whatever is necessary to salvation will be found in the shallows, and that a simple, teachable child of God has no *occasion to* flounder in those depths that are

beyond his reach. It is not so much the intellect that comprehends, and the mind that can grasp the truth, as it is the heart that receives that truth in the love of it, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit, sought in humble, fervent, persevering prayer. It is humbling to think that there is in every unrenewed heart an aversion to the Word of God, and that as the carnal mind is enmity against God, so that enmity spreads alike to all that pertains to God,—His word, His cause, His people; and a captious, uncandid spirit, pride of intellect, or a life at variance with the Bible, would be equally averse to the truths of the Gospel. I do not deny what an apostle has acknowledged, that in some of the subjects which the Word of God has revealed, or, it may be, from which it has but slightly withdrawn the veil, there are things hard to be understood, but it is no warning to be neglected or trifled with which the same apostle adds, that unlearned and unstable men wrest them, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Nor is it without most emphatic meaning, that our Lord, in this passage of Scripture answers His own inquiry in the very words, but with one most significant addition, in which He had asked; "Do not ye therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, nor the power of God?" "*Ye do greatly err.*"

SECTION XXXIX.

(Chapter xii. verses 28—34.)

We have here another question put to Jesus, but what a contrast between the sceptic mockery of the question of the Sadducees, and the honest, anxious inquiry of this Scribe, evidently seeking and desiring to know the truth—the one leading to no end or aim except that by its deep designing subtlety it sought to entangle Jesus, and, by implication, to throw doubt and discredit on that must consolatory of all doctrines, the resurrection of the dead, for well might Paul say, "If in this life only we have hope, then are we of all men the most miserable;" the other the most important inquiry that ever engaged the thought of intelligent and reasoning man, the great end and aim of life, to know the will of God, the only foundation of happiness in life, and of peace in death. "Which is the first commandment of all?" is the question, and the answer which our Lord here gives is much the same, in spirit and in purport, as that which He had before given to the Pharisees and Herodians, when they questioned Him respecting the tribute money, "Render to Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's, and to God that be God's." In the present answer our Lord goes to the source of all, the love of God, ruling and reigning in the heart; in the former it was rather *the practical* obedience springing from that love,

and showing forth itself in good works. The narrative of this incident as recorded by Mark is far more full than in the preceding Gospel, and the character of this Scribe stands forth in honourable contrast to those around him; and we at once perceive that his question was addressed to Jesus in no cavilling or unkind spirit, but we may well believe that he came to Jesus, Scribe and expounder of the law as he was, for an answer to his doubts, a solution to his difficulties. It shows indeed how sadly these Scribes and lawyers must have darkened knowledge, and loaded truth with the incumbrances of their own glosses, that so plainly revealed a truth required confirmation. Had the question been proposed to Jesus by a heathen, He would no doubt have led him to the same truth, though by a different process; for it was by no means a self-evident truth; the light of nature revealed it not; man's reason taught it not, even man's instinct shrunk from it; but to a Jew, to a Scribe instructed in the law, it was enough to refer him to his own Scriptures, the revelation which God had already made of His own will and law. What an illustration does all this give of our Lord's denunciation against these lawyers, that they had taken away the key of knowledge, and closed the door alike against themselves and others. And is not this characteristic of the present day as well—taking away the key of knowledge, or, it may be, hampering the lock by using other keys, which

have no power to open? The Word of God is the key,—"how readest thou?"—"What saith the Scripture?"—"It is written"—"Do ye not err, not knowing the Scriptures?" and yet now it is, in many a quarter, "What saith the church?"—"It is taught"—"It is so held"—"It is so interpreted:" or; the Word itself is laid aside, its authority impugned, its sanction questioned, its source and parentage denied, valuable, it may be, as a picture of early manners or even as a code of morality, but worthless as establishing any doctrine or revealing any truth, as binding on the consciences of any, and, in defiance of the apostolic warning, adapting itself to the private interpretation of every man's own reason. It is very significant, how our Lord continually refers to Scripture, how He answers questions, solves doubts, and confounds adversaries in the very words of Scripture. It was so in the preceding passage, it is so again in the present one; and it is to us a solemn caution to walk in the same path, not to make man's crooked reason, but the straight rule of God's Word, our measure and our standard, "taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

But let us not overlook the lesson taught in this expressive quotation from the book of Deuteronomy! What an extensive demand is here made upon our love! But is it one grain too much? is the standard one hair's-breadth too high? "The Lord our God is one Lord," and

therefore that adoration and devotion which the heathen divided among their gods many and their lords many, the child of God concentrates on one object alone: and that the supreme as well as only object of his affections and homage. Can there be a more touching claim, a more affecting appeal from a father to his child, when the Lord Himself says to each, "My son, give Me thine heart—all that I have is thine, thou art ever with Me." It is the great God of heaven, before whom seraphim and cherubim bow their veiled heads; it is He, as if the glories and felicities of heaven were incomplete, it is He who asks for His creature's love and heart, as if needful to His perfection. And what a heart in itself, how unfit for the Almighty, even to look upon, till it has been washed and cleansed in the blood of Jesus, sanctified and made meet for the Master's use, till Jesus Himself has taken the polluted, sin-stained heart of man, and presented it without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. We may well cry out with Paul, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

SECTION XL.

(Chapter xii. verses 35—40.)

We may well exclaim with the apostle, "Great is the mystery of godliness;" "God manifest in the flesh." The question which our Lord here proposes, is in reference to that wonderful mystery, that Jesus is both God and man, the son of David, and the Son of God, David's son, and yet David's Lord. I do not wonder that the scribes were unable to explain the mystery; and yet the humblest, and almost the youngest child in a village-school could now answer the question which so perplexed and baffled the scribes of our Saviour's time. And, simple as it may now seem to us who have been taught the truth, it is the most important doctrine of all in the Bible,—the key-stone of the arch of our faith. It is that alone which can give comfort and support under the trials and sorrows of life, and can uphold and strengthen the fainting spirit "in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment." It is that doctrine which is so admirably condensed in that creed in our Prayer-book which is called the Athanasian, and which declares "the right faith to be, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; perfect God, and perfect man; and who, although He be God and man, yet He is not *two,* but one Christ." It was, indeed, necessary

that Christ, as our Substitute, should take our nature upon Him, that the same nature which had sinned should also suffer; and that though He was Himself free from every stain or spot of sin, yet, not only in our stead, but in our nature, He should suffer, the just for the unjust. And it was equally necessary that He should be God as well as man, that His obedience and His sufferings might be of infinite value as the price and purchase of our redemption, and that His human nature might be supported under that weight of divine wrath which He endured for our sins. It is this union of the two natures which His name so emphatically declares, "They shall call His name Emmanuel, God-Man, God with us." "Unto us a child is born, and His name shall be called the Mighty God." What an argument for our support under trial does the apostle derive from this union of the God-Man in one Christ,—from His manhood, that "we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with a sense of our infirmities, but was in all things tempted like as we are, though without sin; and from His Godhead, that He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Ask a poor, suffering child of God what, in his hours of sickness and despondency, is his dearest privilege and his sweetest comfort, and he will tell you that it is that he can pour out every sorrow, and tell every throb

of pain, communicate every anxiety and depression of spirit to One who not only feels and sympathizes with His tried ones, but has Himself gone through every scene of suffering and trial in His own person. If Jesus were alone God, the God that sitteth in the highest heavens, far above all principalities and powers, we might indeed confide in Him as One mighty to save; but we could hardly pour out our very hearts before Him as one tender to sympathize; we might well doubt whether He who "*humbleth Himself* to behold the things even in heaven," could stoop so immeasurably low as to regard the things on earth. And if Jesus were alone man, we might indeed feel comfort and support in His sympathy; but we could hardly feel assurance that He could "save to the uttermost;"—there would be moments of despondency that we were perhaps building only on the sand; there would be one too ready to suggest and insinuate that we were leaning only on a reed. It is on the Godhead alone of Jesus that the soul in its departing hour can place its foot as on a rock, and from that rock take its undoubting and assured flight to heaven. It is only in the union of the two natures of Christ that we feel how completely and entirely Jesus is the Saviour suited for lost and perishing sinners,—as man, to suffer and to die in our nature, and on our behalf,—as God, to offer a fitting sacrifice and accepted atonement; as man, to sympathize, and

as God, to save. Well might it be said that "the people heard Him gladly" and gratefully, as He uttered these gracious truths; and they ought to be as dear to us now, as to those of Jesus's day. We are alike concerned, as deeply interested, both in the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ. "If He became poor, it was that through His poverty we might be made rich;" if He was made a curse, it was for us, that He might "redeem us from the curse of the law." And if "God raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory, it was that our faith and hope might be in God, that as Jesus died and rose again, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." If He has now finished His work of humiliation on earth, and has re-ascended up to heaven, He has gone to prepare a place for us, that where He is, there we may be also. If He now ever liveth, and is seated at the right hand of God, it is to make intercession for us. We cannot say this of David, neither of David's sons according to the flesh; they are both dead and buried, and their sepulchres still survived even in our Lord's time; but, blessed be God, we can say this of Him, who, though David's son, was yet David's Lord, and we may add with Peter, that "in no other is there salvation: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

SECTION XLI.

(Chapter xii. verse 41 to the end.)

THE incident recorded in these three or four verses is a very simple, and, according to the world's arithmetic, a very insignificant one; yet approved as it has been by Jesus, and selected by the Holy Spirit as worthy of record, it may well receive at our hands a few words of comment upon it. The world's annals have, no doubt, recorded some noble testimonies of charity, some splendid exhibitions of that love which can surrender much for Jesus; but the word of God seems especially to take delight in recording the simple annals of the poor's bestowals to Lord's treasury. It is a poor widow in the present instance, so poor that we might almost think it impossible to imagine one poorer; yet in the history of the Old Testament we find another widow, under similar circumstances of still greater destitution, exercising a still nobler act of love and charity than even here. That poor widow had but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse, and was gathering a few sticks, to kindle a fire, that she might bake a little cake for herself and her son, that they might eat it and die. Yet she sees a poor, way-worn traveller passing by, and at his solicitation willingly shares with him the only morsel she had for herself and son. She was a heathen,

and it was not without significant meaning that Jesus refers to her act of love in the very first discourse he preached in the synagogue of Nazareth. There is another incident of simple unostentatious love recorded in the case of Dorcas, who, perhaps, like the apostles, had neither silver nor gold, yet, such as she had, and such as she could, she willingly did in the name of the Lord Jesus.

It is not without especial purpose that the Spirit of God has selected these instances of woman's love and woman's beneficence for record in His own blessed volume. We cannot say of these that their memorial has perished with them, for they have been preserved in the imperishable annals of Holy Writ, and the knowledge of them has extended to the very ends of the world. Yet it is remarkable that the names of neither of these poor widows are recorded; their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and far more blessed to be registered there than to be blazoned in the world's histories. I have no doubt that that register on high has many and many a name, like those of these poor widows, unknown to human record, and many an act of charity and love inscribed on its roll, which may well stand side by side with that of this widow, and that the last day will bring to light many a hidden one of God's family, who is rich in such good works, though it may be but the dole of a farthing, or a cup of cold water

given to a disciple in the name of Jesus. It is a great privilege to the poor of Christ's flock, to know that Jesus loves to accept such simple memorials of His people's love. It is not all that have the silver and gold, nor is the merely having it any evidence of God's love; but it is a great evidence of the Lord's love, and of His grace reigning in the heart, to have that heart devising and practising every little act of love and kindness to fellow-creatures, even amid, and even in spite of the privations of poverty, and those pressing claims of home, which might almost seem to justify a passing by on the other side. I am not depreciating the charities of the rich, nor do I think that our Lord here meant to do so; they indeed gave of their abundance, and perhaps returned home to their abundance; their gifts involved no self-denial, entailed no curtailment, abridged no comforts; and I think I can read in this and other portions of Scripture, that amid other privileges peculiar to the poor, that too which seemed most incompatible with its condition, real, heartfelt charity, should be vouchsafed also, and that our Lord seems to intimate that, except in some rare instances, great wealth, though it might give abundantly, should never attain that higher and purer charity which takes, as it were, from its own lips the food which it gives to others; and which, unseen and unknown on earth, pursues its silent, unobtrusive walk of love, without money and beyond price. We are

apt to think that charity is or must be confined to the rich. God seems to intimate otherwise, as if the charity which He most approves were more exhibited by the poor. And I have known more than one instance where an orphan child has been adopted into a poor man's home, simply because it was an orphan, and God had put it into his heart to take that orphan; and it has eaten of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lain in his bosom, and has been unto him as a daughter, though he has himself toiled the harder every day, and fared the worse every meal to provide for the desolate one of God's family. And I believe the great principle which lies at the bottom, and which so emphatically marks God's approval and acceptance, is the faith which prompts the act, and the unhesitating reliance on God's word and promise which it exhibits. The Lord's demand is assuredly a great one: "Sell that thou hast;" sell *all* that thou hast; and this poor widow did cast in "all she had, even all her living." It *is* a great demand; the rich young man responded not; the poor widow of Sarepta, and she of Israel, took the Lord at His word, and found it even as He had said. I do not say that we are now called upon literally to put this precept in practice; but we see to what extent God requires us to exercise faith—faith that can resign an Isaac, and faith that can sell all, either for God's poor or for God's temple.

SECTION XLII.

(Chapter xiii. verses 1—31.)

It is singular that the first sin of man was prompted by a desire to be wise above what God had appointed, to know more than God had ordained should be known, and that this morbid curiosity and vain desire should have continued to be more or less, ever since the besetting sin of man. It was this feeling which, in ancient times, sought by means of wizards and sorcerers to pry into futurity, or from the oracles of heathen lands to extract, if possible, a knowledge of what was to ensue hereafter. Within certain bounds and limits the desire itself may not be unreasonable nor sinful; it is when pushed beyond these limits that it becomes criminal and dangerous. As far indeed as man is concerned, there is not a greater proof of the compassion and loving-kindness of God, than that He has concealed from us the future events of our life, that He has placed an impenetrable covering even over to-morrow, which, however strongly we may desire it, we can neither uplift, nor pry beneath. We may plan for to-morrow, we may propose for a year to come, but we in reality know with as little certainty what will be the result of to-morrow, as what will be our position a year hence. I have said that it is an evidence of the great compassion of the Lord; for who of all the

sons of men could bear to know with unerring exactness all the trials and tribulations, the sicknesses and sufferings, the bitternesses and bereavements of a whole life. It would not merely hinder exertion, it would neutralize all energy, all activity, and paralyze every duty. I can look back on the past, and in retracing every step by which the Lord hath led me, I can now see that mercy, and truth, and righteousness, have followed me all the days of my life. I can testify that those things, which, with the erring judgment of the Patriarch, I once thought against me, were only helps and furtherances on the road, and that many a dark cloud into which one feared to enter, issued in brighter light, and led to an easier path; but, had the picture been reversed, had I been enabled to look forward with as clear a vision, as I can now look backward, it would have been perhaps a burden too heavy to bear; and so, were the Lord to uplift the veil of the future years of any one of you, though there might be some things to gladden and to cheer, you would be far more ready to go on your way weeping, even though the sight were accompanied by the assurance that you should doubtless come again with joy. Yet God has revealed to us enough to guide us on our way; He has told us that this life is not our rest; that here we have no continuing city; that we are pilgrims and strangers on earth, on our road to a better and an heavenly country; that

along that road, on every side, are perils and conflicts, and that the Christian's life in the world is to be one of much tribulation. The disciples in this chapter were eager to know the times and the seasons of which Jesus had been speaking with reference to the temple and Jerusalem; and our Lord, though He enters at great length into a general statement of what they were personally to expect, yet discloses no more than was necessary for their guidance in His service, and for their caution and encouragement amid their many trials. Yet how tenderly is consolation blended throughout, even with the details of suffering; and what assurances of the Lord's protecting power over them, to the very close, are given! But were the disciples alone entitled to these precious promises?—were the Christians of that day the only ones empowered to derive comfort from these declarations of upholding love and grace? Has Jesus no dear ones now? Are there none "elect according to the foreknowledge of God," no "remnant according to the election of grace"? There are the Lord's elect in every age, His "peculiar people," like their Master, the chief corner-stone in Zion, equally in Him "elect, precious," "chosen of God in Christ before the foundation of the world," and because chosen, secured by every attribute which encircles Jehovah. I do not know a stronger expression than the one our Lord here uses, "To seduce, if it were possible,

even the elect," to intimate the security of all God's children, even in the midst of such fiery conflicts as those to which they whom He was addressing would be exposed, and as many of the Lord's people in after ages, and even in Christian lands, would so fearfully endure. It does not indeed say of them that they are invulnerable; it does not say of them that they are never wounded, never wearied, never faint; that there are no times when hands hang down and knees wax feeble, or, it may be, even struck to the ground; but it does say they shall never perish, that "He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." They may be wounded, but they still fight on; they may be faint, yet, like Gideon's soldiers, are still pursuing; their uplifted hands and arms may hang down, like those of Moses on the mount, through weariness, but God will send mightier aid than that of Aaron and Hur, and Himself will be their defence on their right hand and on their left. The expression here used seems to imply the strongest impossibility even amidst the severest conflicts; as if hell and Satan were putting forth their utmost power to pluck one of Christ's elect out of His Father's hands. The peril shall be so imminent, the trial so overwhelming, the furnace so heated, the malice and the fury so urgent, that "the very elect," "if it were possible," should be drawn aside. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, "all power in

heaven and in earth is given unto Him," and He has said, "No one shall pluck them out of My hand."

SECTION XLIII.

(Chapter xiii. verse 32 to the end.)

THERE is one verse in this portion of Scripture, which so very strikingly points out the relative position, and the duty of every man in this life, that, embracing as it does the important lesson which our Lord meant to inculcate in the various warnings of this chapter, I shall confine my few observations to it alone. The verse is the 34th: "The Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch." Jesus Christ has long since personally left His abode on earth, and returned to His Father's house in heaven. But He has not, on that account, ceased to feel the deepest and the liveliest interest in all that concerns this earth, and in them that dwell thereon. He came down from heaven, and for a season took up His abode here, that He might rescue and redeem man from the bondage and the ruin in which he had involved himself. Having effected His purpose at the price of His own blood, He ascended again to His Father's house, with the avowed purpose of returning at some future time to institute inquiry as to how His servants have

managed His earthly heritage during His absence, and to reward or punish each according to that he has done. He has "given authority to His servants," that is, He has assigned to them power and privilege to occupy and cultivate till He comes; He "has given to every man his work," and, in addition, over each person He has placed a guardian "porter to watch." One man indeed may have a larger portion of the field than another; one may have a more arduous and onerous responsibility than another; one may be placed on high, and another may occupy a lower station, but each one has "his work" assigned him, and it is the Master, the Owner, the Lord of the heritage who assigns that work, and who will hereafter demand account. And in this view of the case I should be inclined to think that the man who had the least for which to account, would be the happiest and the safest, and yet very few, scarcely one, think so; all are eager and striving to add to that for which they must give account; and yet there is one point in which all are on an equality, and in which there is no difference. He has given to every one a precious and immortal soul, for which he is to be responsible when that Master comes to reckon with him. Nor has He left any without guidance and direction, to say nothing of the means of grace within the reach of each one, to say nothing of the aid of the Holy Spirit, which is promised without distinction and without limitation to

every one that will ask. He has moreover placed at the door of every man's heart a "porter to watch," and that porter's name is CONSCIENCE. As God left not Himself without witness in the world, so has He placed in the breast of every one a monitor to warn, to check, and restrain from evil, as well as guide him to right. But, remember, that porter may be tampered with, he may prove unfaithful to his trust, and may even enter into parley with the enemy; he may forbear to warn, he may be drugged with opiates, and be sunk into a fatal lethargy or slumber. Or there is a more fearful alternative still: the porter may be faithful, but the heart callous, and then God Himself, in righteous retribution, may remove the porter altogether, may cease to strive with the sinner, and leave him, like Pharaoh, to go on hardening himself to his irrevocable ruin. And if that porter be unfaithful or untrue, or if he be faithful and yet his warnings be disregarded and unheeded, the work is equally left undone, or done so negligently and imperfectly, that when the Master demands account of that soul there is no account ready. The unprepared soul, in its moment of need, is distractedly running here and there, hurriedly attempting to put this and that to rights, even while his Lord is knocking at the door, and demanding immediate admission. It adds very fearfully to our responsibility, that the very porter set over us to watch, may through our *negligence* be in so many ways unfaithful to his

trust, that the very means appointed of God in mercy to guard our souls should so frequently prove an occasion of falling. I am quite sure, however, that if we were faithful the porter would be faithful too; if we were true to ourselves, he would be true to us; but we so soon begin to find his presence irksome, his vigilance oppressive, his rebukes offensive, his fidelity a reproach, that we too frequently rejoice over our emancipation from control, when our slights have put him to silence, or dismissed him altogether from our service. It is as if we ourselves had sent away the watchman, and left the gate open; and can we wonder that that enemy, who is ever going about and seeking access to every heart, finding admission so easy, should enter in and dwell there? If he find but one crevice unguarded, he will creep in at it; if he see but, as it were, one stake in the hedge plucked up, he will make the gap larger; how much more when he finds the door wide open, and the porter, either slumbering at his post, or thrust out from our service?

SECTION XLIV.

(Chapter xiv. verses 1—11.)

WE are now once more approaching the saddening scene of our Lord's sufferings. The enmity of the Scribes and Pharisees, which they had so evidently manifested in every question

they had put to Jesus, now leads them to more decided steps for carrying out their murderous purpose. But their courage did not equal their malice, and they sought to attain their end by craft rather than by open violence. The Passover of the Jews was now close at hand; and, as you know, persons from all quarters and districts, however distant, came to the festival. No doubt many from Galilee would be there; Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, and his own city, Nazareth, would send forth their numbers; and although they had, as a people, rejected Him as the Messiah, yet His miracles of mercy and His deeds of love were too many and too recent to be easily forgotten. Many, too, of those on whom His acts of healing had been wrought, themselves, their friends and relatives, would be in Jerusalem at the feast; and any act of violence or outrage on Jesus would in all probability have caused a serious uproar and disturbance; and, therefore, it is resolved to proceed and gain their end by underhand and secret stratagem. But how was their device to be carried out?—it was more than they could tell. The devil, however, never fails his friends at a pinch, if it be to lead them on to further sin and deeper guilt. He is ever at hand to help them over a difficulty; and so it was here: he suggests to the covetous heart of Judas to betray his Lord and Master; and the very opening they would have sought, the very *means* they would have desired for their purpose,

is by Satan's contrivance brought, as it were, to their own door and offered to their acceptance. Well, indeed, might they be "glad" at such an opportune proposal; but I cannot imagine that either the chief priests or Judas himself, if they reflected at all, could for a moment have deceived themselves in the idea, that this successful beginning was any indication of God's approval. God, indeed, had determined beforehand that the Lord of Life should be taken, and by wicked hands be crucified and slain, and yet it is quite true, that though the priests in their envy, and Judas in his covetousness, and Satan in his malice, were each and all only working out what God, in His counsels from everlasting, had determined beforehand should be done, it in no degree diminished the guilt or the atrocity either of the human instruments, or the hellish agent. The chief priests need a traitor, Satan prepares one to their hands, and introduces the parties to each other; and yet both Judas and the priests think themselves independent agents, and each furthering their own ends and interests, and never dream that they are instigated and set in motion by one more subtle and more malicious even than themselves; while He, the object of all this inveterate hatred and subtlety, how does He comport Himself as the hour of trial and agony draws nigh? He knew from the beginning the treachery of Judas, He had foreseen and foretold every insult and torture, and He was perfectly conscious

that His hour was at hand: yet with what holy calmness and serenity does the blessed Jesus look forward to the approaching consummation —with what mild dignity does He proceed to do what remained of His work on earth! and though cognisant of all, makes not an effort to avert or delay the deed. And when, as He sat at meat in the house of one whom He had healed of the leprosy, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, in the outpourings and gushings of her grateful heart, broke and poured over His head, according to oriental custom, the most precious and costly unguent of the day, and when others of the company rebuked the act as wasteful and extravagant, Jesus, in the approving acknowledgment of her love, accepts the offering, and with touching tenderness declares, that however unconscious of her purpose, she had but anointed His body for the burying. Other Marys came after His death with sweet spices to embalm His body, but this Mary had come beforehand on the same pious and holy errand; and her act of love drew from the lips of Jesus, not only approval of herself, but those most blessed words of encouragement even to the lowliest and poorest disciple, "She hath done what she could." It was not all that love would have prompted, or zeal dictated, like the affectionate Galatians of whom Paul testifies, that, if it had been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes, *and given* them to him. The impulse of the

heart is far beyond the power of the hand; human means and human strength are poor, narrow limits for the love that burns within; and many a disappointed child of God, looking back at what love has wished, and what reality has accomplished, has turned away in sorrow from an offering so apparently poor and worthless; yet over against that offering the Lord hath written His acceptance—"She hath done what she could"—and has directed His apostle to endorse it with the declaration, that "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

SECTION XLV.

(Chapter xiv. verses 12—22.)

THERE is something very singular in the manner in which the disciples received their Master's declaration that one of them should betray Him. Of course *we* are well assured that of those twelve who were on that eventful night seated at the table with Him, eleven were altogether innocent of the charge; that such an idea had never entered their minds; and that if such a proposition had ever been made to any one of them, they would, one and all, have rejected it with horror and indignation. They must, too, have been perfectly conscious in themselves that such a course had

never entered their imagination; and that, if from any other lips they had heard the charge that there was a traitor in their ranks, they would have repudiated the imputation with abhorrence. Well might they have been sorrowful at such a declaration coming from the lips of the Master they loved, and to whom, up to that moment, they had so faithfully adhered; and one almost expects the abhorrent denial of such a crime to burst from every heart, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" But it is not so. First one, and then another, asks, "Is it I?" The impetuous Peter no more says, "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee;" but he asks, "Is it I?" The loving and the loved John, as he leans upon his Master's bosom, looks not reproachfully in His face, and says, "Can I betray thee?" but he, too, falters out, "Is it I?" And so, one by one, they say all. To what are we to impute this? It is assuredly singular that men, conscious of their innocence, should yield so unreservedly to such a charge of treachery and ingratitude. They did not doubt the fact that, as Jesus declared, there was a traitor among them; and I think we may fairly infer, from the behaviour of his fellow-disciples, that up to this moment no suspicion of Judas had ever entered into their minds; that, though undoubtedly in the sight of God, his heart was not right, yet that he had outwardly maintained the appearance of a faithful follower of his Lord.

And it may be that up to that period when he yielded to the suggestions of the Evil One, he might not himself have had a suspicion of that evil heart of unbelief, which was so speedily and so fatally to lead him to depart from the living God. It offers a very salutary lesson to ourselves: it tells us, in most impressive language, that the heart is deceitful above all things, and that few can understand it. I think these disciples, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, must have been under such a conviction at the time; and that, with their Master's declaration sounding in their ears, and amid the peculiar solemnities of that most impressive feast, of which they were then partaking for the last time in company with their beloved Master, they seem to have shrunk in dismay and sorrow from the possibility that they might be led to such deep guilt. It is no doubt an humbling reflection that Judas the preacher was Judas the traitor; that the follower of Jesus was the betrayer of Jesus; and that no parts nor privileges, without the grace of God accompanying and sealing them, can avail in a time of trial and temptation. When God's sifting season comes, the mere chaff of profession will fall through. Suppose that at this moment a voice from heaven was audibly heard in this very room, "Verily I say unto you, one of you shall betray Me," what would be our feelings, what would be our language? Should we, like these of whom we have been reading, stammer

forth, in consternation and in sorrow, "Lord, is it I?" or should we not be more ready, in the supposed security and innocence of our hearts, to repudiate such a thought with all the indignant vehemence of an Hazael, and say, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do these things?" Alas! "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Let you and me search into our hearts, and see whether there has not been already a betrayal of Jesus; nay more, whether we ourselves may not, with Judas have betrayed Him, with Peter denied Him, and with the rest forsaken Him. It is so easy to say, and so much easier to think, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have consented unto their deeds;" and yet it may be, as Paul says, "Thou that judgest another, doest the same thing." The denial of Christ is not merely the utterance of the words, "I do not know the man." The betrayal of Christ is not to say to those who thirst for His blood, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He. Take Him, and lead Him away." The forsaking of Christ is not merely in the hour of danger to flee from Him, and leave Him alone. The garden of Gethsemane is closed, and no scene of treachery or cowardice can be re-enacted there; the high priest's palace no longer stands, and no maiden can taunt us there. But to deny Christ is, not to confess Him before men; to be ashamed to be known as one of His; to shrink from the *avowal,* "As for me, I am not ashamed of the

gospel of Christ;" "I have sworn, and am stedfastly purposed to keep my vows." To betray Christ, is to give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully, or by our own inconsistency to put a stumbling-block in a brother's way, and be unto him an occasion of falling; to betray Christ, is to betray His cause, His truth, and from that fear of man which bringeth a snare, or from mistaken conciliation, to allow error to go unrebuked, and sin unstigmatized. To forsake Christ, is to love father, or mother, or brother, or sister more than Christ; like the young man, to prefer the world, and the world's wealth, and the world's vanities and pleasures to Christ. To forsake Christ, is to be offended at His law, His precepts, His doctrines, and, like some of old mentioned by St. John, to "go back, and walk no more with Him." Surely we have need to pray for the upholding and preserving grace of God; and if happily, through that grace, we are "kept from falling," still "not to be high-minded, but fear;" and in much humbleness of spirit to ask, "Who hath made us to differ?"

SECTION XLVI.

(Chapter xiv. verses 22—25.)

We have here the institution of the Lord's Supper as ordained by Christ Himself, in the very words He used, and in the very manner He

appointed it. It was no temporary rite, no incidental ordinance, intended for the strengthening and refreshment of those alone, who sat with Jesus at that sacramental table, and then to pass away. It was an ordinance to be observed throughout all generations till the end of time: it was to be confined to no clime, no country, but "its line was to go through all the earth, and its words to the end of the world:" it was to be limited to no class, no sex, no age, but its broad invitation was "Whosoever will;" "Let him that is athirst, come." It was to exhibit or "shew forth the Lord's death, till His coming again;" it was to be the bond of union between Christ and His people to the end of the world, and from that hour of its first institution to its last and latest celebration, it has been the channel through which the most precious streams of consolation have flowed to the believing communicant. The first thing which strikes us is the extreme simplicity of the rite, and the studied brevity in which its institution is recorded. In the present gospel it is all included in the compass of three verses, or, as that is an arbitrary and comparatively recent division, in forty-six words! In the Gospel of St. Matthew it occupies the same space as to verses, or fifty-one words, and in St. Luke's only two verses, or forty-six words, while John's supplementary Gospel does not name it. And St. Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians, *commenting* on the ordinance, and rebuking the

grievous errors which had crept into that church respecting it, employs only fourteen verses in his censure, comment and all. It puts indeed to shame man's wordy legislature; it would be impossible to find any ordinance of human appointment, intended to be of universal and permanent character, so briefly registered: and yet its brevity has attained its end more effectually than the most verbose phraseology; for the ordinance of the Lord's Supper has ever since continued the distinguishing badge and characteristic of the Christian church. It was the same voice, which in the beginning said, "Let there be light, and there was light," and light has remained from that hour to this. It was He who declared that while the earth remained, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night should never cease;" and they never have ceased. It was that same voice, and that same Almighty Being, which said of the bread, "Take, eat: this is My body," and of the cup, "Drink ye all of this: for this is My blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins:" and from that hour to this, wherever a congregation of faithful men has been found united in the fellowship of Christ Jesus, there has this, which He ordained, been found also, and these memorials of a Saviour's love and these emblems of that full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, which He offered upon the cross for the sins of the whole world been set forth

before them, and will continue to be, until His coming again.

I would call to your recollection also the hour in which this ordinance was appointed, in connection with the words I have just read. It was, as you know, the night preceding His crucifixion. He was perfectly aware that in a few hours He should be nailed to the cross; He knew every drop of bitterness that His Father's hand was to mingle in that cup of suffering which He was about to drink; and yet, at this moment of exceeding sorrow, He loses sight, as it were, for one brief instant of His own sufferings in the consolation and salvation of those whom He came to save, and leaves this dying pledge to be retained in memorial of His undying love, till He should come again. Nay more, so great was His love, at the very moment of consecrating the element that was to represent His blood poured out, that He "gave thanks," rejoicing that on Him the Lord had laid the iniquities of us all, that He was to bear the burden of our sins, that His Father had accepted Him as our surety, that His blood should henceforth cleanse from all sin, and that He should be able to save to the very uttermost all that come unto God by Him. How does this illustrate and give energy to that intense longing of his soul, when He exclaimed, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" And how too *does the* memorial of that night, as with thanks-

giving He poured it forth, exemplify the greatness of that love wherewith He loved us, in that in the very contemplation of all that was deepening and darkening around Him, "for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." And all this of His own free gift. He "gave" to them the bread, He "gave" to them the cup, intimating that Christ is the free gift of God, to sinners of mankind, for salvation and eternal life. "God so loved the world, that He *gave* His only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

SECTION XLVII.

(Chapter xiv. verses 26—43.)

It is not often that the veil is lifted up, and that we are permitted to know the secret communings even of man with his Creator. Diaries and records of prayer of holy men have however been found, which in some measure disclose the feelings which have influenced them, when pouring out their hearts before God. But in every such case, they were but the communings of a sinner with his Judge, the confessions of an erring but penitent child to his forgiving Father, the earnest longings of a redeemed spirit for complete deliverance from sin; something in every case to be taken

that it was a fallen child of Adam, who was holding intercourse with his Father in heaven.

But here we have the prayer of one who was "without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled," the secret outpouring of the heart of Him, whom the Father out of heaven had pronounced His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased. We are permitted to accompany the holy Jesus across the brook Cedron; we enter with Him into the garden of Gethsemane, and we behold the Son of God in communion with His Father. The veil is lifted up, and we are privileged to see the very posture, the very attitude in which the Saviour prayed, and to hear the very words He uttered. But oh! what a sight is here! Jesus prostrate on the earth, His face steeped as it were in the dust, pouring out the strong agony of His supplication, while from His brow streamed down the bloody sweat, which betokened the inward conflict of His soul, while He prayed His Father, that if it were possible He would take the cup of bitterness from Him. It was the prayer of the Man Jesus, of Jesus in His human nature, and in that nature shrinking from the weight of sorrow which pressed upon Him. But what was it that could force such a cry, such a prayer from Him who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth? What was that weight of sorrow, which, in that night of agony, bowed and bent His exhausted frame to the very dust? It is *easy to* say, "It was a world's sin:" but do we

realize what sin is, in which a whole world shares? Do we feel its atrocity, its humiliation, when it rests alike on every member and child of the family of Adam? Jesus was then enduring the burden of the sin of the very Jews who crucified Him, of those very disciples by His side, and who yet, in the midst of their Master's agony, were asleep; nay, He was bearing our sins, your sins and my sins. Yes! *we* were adding to the sorrows of that hour: Jesus in that prayer of prescient agony had us in His view, in His purpose of mercy and redeeming love had us as fully before His all-seeing eye as those who had already died, and those who were even then on the earth. And it was for our sakes, as well as theirs, that no sooner had He uttered the words for the withdrawal of that cup, than, as Mediator, He instantly recalls the words, and in full acceptance of His covenant engagement with His Father, adds, "Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done!" And He did drain that cup to the very last drop, not as He merely tasted of the gall of which, "when He had tasted, He would not drink;" but as when Peter in his zeal would have made a way for Him to escape, He forbade him, saying, "Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"

There is something most painful, and yet, strange to say, consolatory, in this narrative of our Saviour's mental agony. As one reads the

details of martyrs' sufferings, their calm serenity, their sometimes triumphant joy and victorious faith amid the cruelties of their persecutors, one feels that strength from above, far beyond that of natural endurance, has been vouchsafed to them, and that even bodily pain perhaps has been mysteriously and graciously abated, and it may be, that a similar thought may have suggested itself with regard to Jesus. But Gethsemane witnessed real agony; the cry on the cross indicated no upholding presence of His Father; and though, at the close of this scene in the garden, an angel from heaven came to strengthen Him, there can be no doubt that He trod the wine-press of God's wrath alone; that there was none to help, none to uphold; that He bore to the very uttermost that fiery indignation which must otherwise have consumed us. The debt has been exacted, the debt has been paid, and that to the very last farthing. In the agonies of Jesus we read the cancelling of the handwriting that was against us; we see Jesus nailing it to the cross on which He hung; and when He cried, "It is finished!" it was blotted out for ever.

SECTION XLVIII.

(Chapter xiv. verses 43—52.)

THE whole of the preceding scene in the *garden* of Gethsemane, as of all the indignities

and insults heaped upon Jesus subsequently, would be incomprehensible to us, but for the clue which our Lord Himself has given us for the unravelling of the mystery. The agony in the garden, the treachery of Judas, the desertion of His disciples, and all the various cruelties and outrages of that night and the succeeding day, would be perfectly inexplicable to us, had we not the pages of the Old Testament to throw their light on what would be otherwise so dark and unintelligible. All this was done, as our Lord Himself declared, because "the Scriptures must be fulfilled." Every detail of suffering, every incident of cruelty, had been so accurately foretold and prefigured in the Old, and so faithfully and minutely fulfilled even to the very letter in the New, that the two Testaments are like two buttresses, on which the building of the Christian faith and religion rests, and the removal of which, or of either, would at once shatter and destroy the whole fabric.

And yet it is against the inspiration of the Bible that the efforts of many in the present day are directed; it is against those very Scriptures to which our Lord appeals, and which He declares *must* be fulfilled, that the puny weapons of man are levelled. It is no incidental coincidence, no casual concurrence, which traces an indistinct, or faint, or even a strong agreement between the predictions of the Old and the narrative of the New. Jesus here asserts that the conduct of this

very armed band, that the treachery of their leader, so inexplicable in itself, and so improbable in all its circumstances, because so easily guarded against,—was the result not only of the foreknowledge, but of the determinate counsels of Jehovah; that holy men of old had spoken as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and that they had declared that thus it should be; and though heaven and earth should pass away, yet not one tittle of God's word should fail. "The Scriptures must be fulfilled;" and so they were in all that occurred at the birth of Jesus, in all He did during His ministry, and in all He suffered in Gethsemane, and on Calvary. It is, too, in fulfilment of the same Scriptures, that even now persons are found, and books written, and arguments distorted and brought forward to disprove the inspiration of the Bible as a rule of faith. It might seem inexplicable to us, that in these latter days, when God has so emphatically set His seal to the undoubted and plenary inspiration of His holy Word, that any should be found, and that too among those whose boast is their reason, to cavil at it. But the answer is, "The Scriptures must be fulfilled;" and those Scriptures have declared that in these latter days shall come "scoffers," and "mockers," walking after their own lusts. I do not say that every portion of Holy Scripture is equally interesting, or perhaps equally valuable and instructive, but every page and word is alike the Word of

God, and He has declared of every portion of it by the mouth of an inspired apostle, "*All* Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works;" a declaration that "may well put to silence" not only "the ignorance," but the cavils of such "foolish men." And I would add this warning to ourselves, that he who allows himself the privilege of discarding one portion as unnecessary, has admitted a principle which will undermine the whole of his own faith and hopes with it. This reference of our Lord to the Scriptures, at such a moment of tumult and outrage, as well as His whole address to the multitude, is a striking evidence of the serenity of Jesus' mind even under such circumstances, and might well have encouraged the timid disciples to have stayed by Him in this hour of danger; but how then could the Scriptures be fulfilled? How could His own word be fulfilled, which had declared, that ere that night had closed, they would be scattered, every one to his own, and would leave Him alone. It is a striking testimony to the value of prayer; before He began to pray, He had said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," and we know how, during His prayer, that soul was agonized and torn, and yet the conclusion of that prayer was an unreserved and entire submission to His

Father's will in all that was now at hand. And He arises from that prayer calm and composed, and goes forth to meet His murderers with a spirit as undisturbed as if He were, indeed, going to the temple to teach. He evinces, indeed, the Divinity that was in Him, but only to save and to heal others. He saved others, Himself He would not save;—we might almost adopt the very words of the chief priests, and say, He could not save? for how, then, could the Scriptures be fulfilled?

SECTION XLIX.

(Chapter xiv. verse 53 to the end.)

We see in this melancholy fall of Peter the sad consequences of his neglect of his Lord's warning and admonition. Jesus had said, not to Peter only, but to His disciples in a body, "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night," and Peter in his self-confidence had declared that, however others might feel, and though *they* might be offended, yet *he* would not. Jesus then turning more emphatically and directly to Peter, declared in the most solemn manner that even he, notwithstanding his vainglorious boast, ere that night had closed should deny Him thrice. One can hardly understand how it was that the self-abasement which had assuredly just before *led* Peter to receive with such horror-stricken

dread the intimation that one of them should betray Him, and to exclaim in affectionate alarm, "Lord, is it I?"—one can hardly, I say, understand how this feeling had so quickly passed away, and given place to such confident self-boasting,—"Though all should be offended, yet will not I,"—"though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise." Everything that had since occurred in that paschal and sacramental room could only have tended to deepen their feelings of sorrow and apprehension, and one would have thought that the conviction that one of their own body was a traitor, might have led Peter to some distrust of himself, and some salutary fear that His Lord's declaration was founded in truth. But it would seem that at this moment the presuming and boasting apostle was left to his own strength, to show him what depths of sin and frailty were in his heart, and yet not so utterly left as to fall finally and irrecoverably. Had the grace of God been altogether withdrawn, Peter's fall would have been as deep and final as that of Judas; but there was a restraining power even in Peter's sin,—there was a barrier raised by mercy, which Satan could not overleap nor pass: "Satan hath desired to have thee, *but I have prayed for thee.*" Oh, blessed intercession! blessed interest in the prayers of Jesus! We now know why Jesus spent whole nights in prayer; why it was that, "rising up a great while before day," he retired to some solitary mountain

to pray. His prayers were even then fencing in those few sheep of His in the wilderness, when He should be withdrawn from them, and they left exposed to all the fiery darts of the wicked one. He was, as it were, writing out their names in that covenant into which He had entered with His Father, and was about to seal and ratify with His own blood. Therefore were they safe, safe in Christ, safe through His intercessions, and secured by His prayers!

Satan hath desired to have thee, and so he desires to have every one: so he desired to have Adam, and will equally desire to have Adam's latest child. So he equally desires to have you and me; but oh! secure an interest in Jesus, and there is the same barrier around you, the same love to watch, the same intercession to plead, the same prayers to go up as a memorial before God, the same blood to cleanse, the same atonement to justify you, as there were around Peter. But Peter fell; it is true, He did; and in the weakness of his fall let us learn the secret of our own strength. The prayer of Jesus saved him, indeed, from a final fall; but that prayer was accompanied by an injunction to watch and pray for himself as well, that he might not enter into temptation. Had Peter followed His Lord's counsel, and prayed for himself, he might not have fallen; but in his self-confidence he neglected both. He accompanied, indeed, his Lord *to the* garden, but it was to slumber; and not

even the touching rebuke of his sorrow-stricken Master, so calculated to recall his protestations of fidelity, "Simon! sleepest *thou?* couldest not *thou* watch with Me one hour?" could arouse him from his selfish sleep. And when awakened by the tumult of the approaching band, though his impetuous zeal led him to make an effort to rescue his Master, yet his courage soon ebbed away, and he, too, forsook Him and fled. But did he withdraw to pray, and bewail his sin? Did he even then recall his Lord's counsel, and fervently pray that he might be led no further into temptation? He did nothing of the sort; but, with strange infatuation, sought the very temptation he should have shunned, and against which he had made no preparation, and thrown up no outwork of vigilance and prayer. Do we wonder at his fall? Far more do we wonder at and recognize and adore the grace of God which restored so deep a sinner, that in him, as well as in Paul afterwards, "Jesus might show forth all long-suffering, as a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." It reads an impressive warning to ourselves, never to let go our hold of God in prayer and holy communion with Him. The moment of our loosening our hold of Him is the moment of our actual fall, and though the question, "Who denied his Master?" is too truly answered by the name of Peter, I fear with most of us there have been times and seasons when conscience

might act the part of Nathan, and say to each one of us, "Thou art the man."

SECTION L.

(Chapter xv. verses 1—14.)

JESUS, in the palace of the high priest, and Jesus before the tribunal of the Roman governor, was alike the doomed and predicted victim of the malice of His enemies. And though it was equally predicted that He should be, and He actually was, the most unresisting and patient of all victims, they treated Him as if He were the most dangerous and formidable enemy of the public peace. When they would apprehend Him in the garden of Gethsemane, though He had with Him but three timid and sleepy followers, they sent a large band of officers and servants, or, as one evangelist describes it, "a great multitude, with swords and staves," to take Him, as if there were danger in the duty, and difficulty in its execution. Did anything occur during His apprehension, or during His examination, to justify these fears and precautions? Not a movement, on the part of Jesus, or even of His followers, save the rash blow of Peter, and the instant miracle of mercy wrought by Jesus to heal the wound, with an injunction to His follower to put up his sword, and forbear from all resistance. All is calm and unmurmuring yielding. To their cruellest insults He offers

no resistance; to their rudest revilings He utters no reply. He is the meek and lowly, and unresisting Lamb, depicted in prophecy. And yet, when they carried Him before Pilate, as they drag Him through the streets, He is bound as the vilest malefactor, or the most degraded prisoner, as if He were the very leader of those who had so recently "made insurrection, and committed murder in the insurrection." This treatment, and indeed the whole prosecution, was so evidently the result of malice and envy, that even Pilate, who appears to have had no feeling in common with his persecutors, was most desirous to rescue Him from their hands, and made many an effort to effect His release. It had been a custom of late years, introduced probably by the Roman governors themselves, to gratify the Jews, at their sacred feast of the Passover to liberate one prisoner, whom the people themselves were permitted the privilege of selecting. Pilate, never doubting but that they would avail themselves of this privilege to save One whom they had so honoured and followed, proposed that Jesus should be the prisoner to be set at liberty. We know the result; we know the infatuated preference; we know the choice they made of a murderer, and their reiterated demand that Barabbas should be released, and Jesus crucified. I dare say the feeling, the natural feeling, in each of our hearts at this moment is that of holy indignation, and a conviction that, had we been present in Pilate's court, our cry would have been,

"Not Barabbas, but Jesus;" and I doubt not but it would. And yet, though the same scene, with all its aggravations of cruelty and outrage, is not now re-enacted, I fear the same infatuated preference of the murderer to the Saviour is lurking in many a heart, and too often exhibited by many, who little think that in their own conduct and practice they are but reiterating that cry, which on that morning echoed through Pilate's hall, "Not this man, but Barabbas." It is the solemn question of the apostle, "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Whom, then, does the sinner obey? whom is he serving? under whose banner is he enlisted? whose standard is he following? whose wages is he receiving? "If ye continue in My word," said our Lord, "then are ye My disciples indeed." That is the test and badge of the discipleship of Jesus; but the sinner is of his father the devil, and that devil has been a murderer from the beginning, and will continue a murderer to the end. He has made insurrection against the God that created him, and been cast out from "his first estate." He it was who brought death into the world; who, in his hellish spite, ruined man; and is still going about, on the same deadly errand, seeking whom he may devour, that he may cast both body and soul into hell, his own abode and place of torment. He is the sinner's master;

he is the being to whom the sinner pays allegiance; and when the choice is set before him day after day and hour after hour, his deliberate avowal is, "Not Jesus, but Satan." The cry of these priests and this rabble was the excited, stimulated cry of exasperated feelings: they knew not what they did, nor what they said. The choice of the sinner is the choice of his heart, the preference of reality. The cry of the Jewish rabble was but the impulse of an hour; that of the sinner too often lasts through a whole life.

SECTION LI.

(Chapter xv. verses 15—32.)

We have had an account of the indignities offered to Jesus by the servants in the high priest's palace. Here we have the repetition of them, accompanied and aggravated by cruel outrage in the guard-room of the Roman soldiers. Whatever might have been the motives of Pilate in the efforts he undoubtedly made to procure the acquittal of Jesus, humanity was certainly not one. Pilate might satisfy his conscience, if it disturbed him, for the condemnation of Jesus, that it prevented a tumult; that it was necessary for the peace of Jerusalem, at such a time of unwonted concourse, and for the quieting of the people, whose exasperated feelings had been so wrought upon by their priests. He might, too, have added,

though perhaps he would not have owned it even in his own heart, how much that cry, "Thou art not Cæsar's friend if thou let this man go," had influenced and overruled his decision. He too well knew the peril of such an imputation with the selfish tyrant of Capreæ, to weigh for one moment the life and sufferings of an insignificant individual against his own interests and continuance in power. He might, too, have justified his adding scourging to crucifixion, by alleging that it was the usual practice among the Romans so to torture their malefactors, though a man of humanity, who knew that he was condemning an innocent person, would have rejoiced to have spared the needless anguish of such an addition to his sufferings. But what shall we say for this Roman judge, from his seat of justice, leaving the very prisoner, of whom he had more than once emphatically declared, "I find in him no fault at all,"—leaving Him, I say, without compunction or remorse, nay, with the utmost indifference and disregard, to the cruel mockery and unfeeling ribaldry of a soldier's guard-room? In the high priest's palace, the character of Jesus, as prophet and Saviour, was the theme of ridicule and insult; in this Roman prætorium, or guard-room, it was Jesus the king on whom they vented their ribald jests, and not their jests only, but their cruelties. Had they merely meant to mock, they would have plaited a crown of straw; but to add torture to insult is man's cruel sport, and a crown of thorns,

therefore, in every spine that pierced His brow, must add its own intense pain to the physical suffering of His scourged and mangled frame. Nor does it appear that it was ever removed. They took indeed the purple robe from off Him, and replaced His own garments; but the crown of thorns was unremoved; and Pilate must have well known this act of cruelty, and consented unto it; for, as St. John tells us, he even brought Jesus forth to the multitude, wearing the crown of thorns, and said, "Behold the man!" And if, as I believe He did, Jesus wore that crown of thorns to the last, well might exhausted nature sink beneath His sufferings, as He toiled up the steep of Calvary, faint beneath the load of His cross. I do not know whether at that period Simon of Cyrene was a disciple of Jesus. He might have been one, and might, perhaps, be looking on this scene of anguish with the intensest emotions of pity and love; and if so, how gladly would he have relieved his suffering Lord from the burden which bowed Him down! But if he were not, as was more probably the case, that cross, so accidentally, so unwillingly laid upon his shoulders, became the greatest blessing to him; and no doubt himself, as well as his son Rufus, were afterwards well-known disciples of the crucified Jesus. How often is it so in the mysterious, but tender dispensations of a loving Father! The presence of Simon on the spot was, to human eye, the merest accident—coming from

the country on an errand of his own, and passing by. The act of the Roman soldiers was but a common act of authority, in "compelling" a stander-by to bear the sufferer's cross, which himself was no longer able to carry; and, as far as they were concerned, it was in chance or in scorn that they laid hold on Simon, and yet it was designed and overruled of God, not merely to record Simon's lowly name, though in unison with that of Jesus, but as a means of grace and mercy, and blessing to himself and his family. And thus how often is it that a cross, however heavy at the moment to bear; an affliction, however grievous; a trial, however unexpected, becomes, in the Lord's hand, a sanctified blessing, though the tried one may have had reason to say, with the Psalmist, "I am afflicted very much;" I had well-nigh perished in mine affliction; yet in the end even such an one has gratefully acknowledged, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

SECTION LII.

(Chapter xv. verse 33 to the end.)

Of all that Jesus uttered on the cross,—and there are seven sayings of His recorded in the various Evangelists,—this is, far beyond all the others, the most melancholy and heartrending: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

The words, as you know, are taken from the 22nd Psalm, and they afford another proof of what I have often before alluded to,—the honour and marked distinction which our Lord put upon the Holy Scriptures. They formed, as it were, His vocabulary in all seasons; and in this, the most trying hour of all, He has recourse to His own inspired volume for the very language which His Holy Spirit had so many centuries before put into the mouth of the patriarch David, to express the anguish of his soul. On the preceding night He had declared to them, "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me:" shortly afterwards He had said, "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night;" to Peter in particular He had added, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice." Yet of all these trials and sorrows, keenly as they were no doubt felt, He might have said, with one of His followers afterwards, "None of these things move Me." His only reply to the treachery of the one was, "Betrayest thou Me with a kiss?" and to the guilty slumbers of the other, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest thou not watch with Me one hour?" and in tender compassion to their infirmity He suggests the only excuse that could palliate their unkindness. The treachery, the desertion, and the denial, were alike foreknown and foretold; it excited no surprise, no resentment, no reproach from His uncomplaining lips. But in that period of agony on the cross, when for three hours the

sun was darkened, and the land was shrouded in thickest gloom, during which He had to drink to the last and bitterest drop the full cup of His Father's wrath against Himself as the substitute for sinners, then, as He entered into that cloud, was this cry of anguish wrung from His oppressed and afflicted soul, as if He had never dreamed of such a sorrow as the withdrawal of His Father's love and support, and in wonder asked the cause, "Why hast Thou done this?" And how could it well be otherwise? One with the Father from all eternity, "as one brought up with Him, daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him," how could He tell what it was for that Father's countenance to be withdrawn? He knew that He was to drink of the cup of His Father's wrath against sin, and He had prayed for its removal, if consistent with that Father's will; nay, more, a thousand years before the hour of need, He had, by His Holy Spirit, provided the very language wherein to express the anguish of His soul; and yet now it seems to come upon Him by surprise, as if He now knew and felt the full bitterness of His suffering, and He asks, as in astonishment, "My God, My God, why hast *Thou* forsaken Me? I knew that earthly friends and followers would forsake Me; I knew that My disciples would desert, one betray, another deny, and all forsake Me; I was aware of and prepared for all this; but why hast *Thou*, My Father and My God, why *hast* Thou forsaken Me?" But God had not

forsaken Him. He had indeed left Him, in the inscrutable mystery of His will, to tread the wine-press alone; but the same feelings were in that Father's heart towards Him, as there were in His own towards His church: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee." There is something of a similar expression recorded of another king, the first monarch of Israel, who, in the extremity of his anguish, exclaimed, "God hath departed from me, and answereth me no more." And it *was* true of Saul. God had forsaken him, and did answer him no more. God's Spirit had ceased to strive with that miserable backslider, and he was left to go deeper and deeper into sin, till he ended in wretched, hopeless suicide. But oh! how immeasurably different the Saviour's cry, from the despairing conviction of Saul, that God had departed from him. Even in the intense agony of the Saviour's cry, there is still the cleaving to God; even in the passionate inquiry why He had withdrawn, He still calls Him, with redoubled energy, "*My* God, *My* God; as in that most melancholy of all Psalms, the eighty-eighth, where all from beginning to end is gloom, and sorrow, and complaint, there is yet one little word which, as here, indicates that however sharp the conflict, or deep the peril, he would still hold

on to God, "O Lord God of *my* salvation, I have cried day and night before thee." It is unrepented sin alone that can now separate: the very cry that Jesus uttered, the very sufferings that drew it from His heart on that cross of shame, are, as it were, the bridge that spans the gulf that once yawned between an offended God and a lost sinner. It was because His Father had, "for a small moment," withdrawn from Jesus, that we now, through Jesus, can draw nigh to God.

SECTION LIII.

(Chapter xvi. verses 1—8.)

THERE are two sources of danger and difficulty as regarded these early and affectionate visitants at the tomb of Jesus,—the one felt and dreaded, the other unknown, and therefore disregarded. There was the cumbrous stone at the grave's mouth, and there was the Roman band of soldiers guarding the sepulchre. Their expression of doubt and dismay is, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" We hear nothing of "Who shall procure us access through this band of soldiers? how shall we elude their vigilance, or escape their interference?" The latter impediment, had they known it, would have been a far more *serious* obstacle than the other, and have ex-

cited far more painful apprehensions. But God, in His overruling providence, had alike removed both from their path,—the known and the unknown danger had equally disappeared,—the guard had fled, and the stone had been violently cast back by an earthquake's shock, and free ingress and egress to the tomb were afforded. And how many a child of God in the way of duty can testify to a similar experience: difficulties which beset him on his outset, and which well-nigh seemed insuperable at the time, have either vanished altogether, or been rendered so comparatively trifling as to have proved no hinderances at all. And how often, too, is it the case, that on reviewing the path we have journeyed, we see that there were difficulties on the road, and hinderances in the way, which we knew not of, which we dreaded not, and against which we had made no provision, and which yet, had not the Lord tenderly removed them out of our way, would have been sources of danger and discouragement, if not of defeat and turning back. It is not, however, only in the way of duty that we may rely on these merciful interpositions of the Lord. "Ye seek Jesus," said the angel to these women; and if our search be the same, if our inquiry be after Him, if there be earnestness and sincerity, love and zeal in the heart, He who said, "Seek and ye shall find," will not disappoint our hopes.

There may be disappointment as well as delay

at first, through our mis-seeking. Had these timid visitants at the tomb gone another way to seek for aid in removing the stone; had they gone to Peter's home, or John's abode; had they sought to hire labourers to help them in the task, how different the result! But they go at once in their helplessness, and with all their fears, deterred by no dangers, hindered by no difficulties; and to them, therefore, were the first tidings of the risen Saviour delivered—they were the first commissioned messengers to others. And so it may be that the sinner, first awakened to a conviction of sin, and a sense of danger, hearing of Him who died to put away sin, may be at first deterred by the weight and magnitude of his offences: "Who shall roll away this load of guilt from my soul? I cannot go as I am to Jesus." And he seeks to lessen the burden, first by this endeavour and by that—by penance, by almsgiving, by ceremonious observances, in every way that his own heart or Satan can suggest, rather than by going, as these poor women did, straight to Jesus, in spite of every difficulty, and in the full assurance that "His blood cleanseth from all sin." It was no doubt a service of peril and of obloquy on which these women deemed themselves to be setting out. Not forty hours had passed since He, whom they sought, had been suspended on the cross. He had hung there as a malefactor; and in His dying ears had sounded *the* execrations of His enemies, and their taunts

for Him to come down from that cross, that they might acknowledge Him as their King. It was this crucified One whom they were seeking, and that only to embalm His bruised and wounded body, and weep over every buried hope. But what is the salutation that meets them, as they enter into the sepulchre? "Ye seek Jesus, which was crucified." How soon is the appellation of "the crucified" applied to the risen Lord, as a title of honour and distinction! The very first intimation of His resurrection, before human eye has rested on His risen frame, is a messenger from heaven, designating Him as "The crucified." The earthquake that rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, rolled away also the shame from the cross. "Therefore let all the house of Israel," and all the ends of the earth, "know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ." It was the errand of His apostles then, and of His ministers now, to "preach Christ crucified." It was the determination of one amongst them, (and it should be the determination of every minister and every disciple now,) "not to know anything among them," to whom he ministered, "save Jesus Christ and Him crucified;" and it was his testimony to the Galatians, that "before their eyes Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth crucified among them;" while with holy indignation he exclaims of himself, "But God forbid that I should glory, *save in* the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

SECTION LIV.

(Chapter xvi. verse 9 to the end.)

THERE is something mournful, but most natural, in the unwillingness of these various followers of our Lord to credit the declaration of His having arisen from the dead. It is indeed frequently said, that we are most ready and inclined to believe, what we wish to be true, and we have even a proverbial saying, that "the wish is father to the thought." But there never was so unfounded an assertion, one so belied by the experience of every affectionate and loving heart. I believe that in almost every instance, where we intently and passionately desire a thing, and look for its accomplishment, that very desire is mingled with the strongest apprehensions of impending disappointment; and the anticipation itself, the nearer it draws to the realization of its wishes, is so weighed down by fear, lest some accident should intervene, that our hearts, even in the very midst of hope, are agitated with undefined, but still real alarm and apprehension. See the anxious mother, watching the return of her loved sailor son from some distant clime. The vessel is in sight, an hour or two more, at most, and she will clasp that boy in her arms. Yet ask her why her heart beats and throbs so quickly; ask her why that look of anxious dread, even in the midst *of her joyous* anticipations, and she will tell you,

it is lest that son should not return in safety; lest, even in the short space of time and distance that now intervenes, some storm, some wave, some unknown but dreaded accident should step in, and dash her hopes to the ground. And even when she has clasped him to her heart, does she not for a moment put him from her, and scan his altered countenance, to trace and recognize the features of her child, in almost doubt that it can be he?

I believe this feeling to be most true to nature in everything that we intensely desire, and I therefore wonder not so much at the incredulity of these women, and the other disciples of our Lord. Had these zealous and affectionate women, as they left their homes on that early morn on their errand of love, been asked, what would be the dearest joy of their heart, what would have thrilled through every fibre with the intensest joy, it would have been, not that the stone should have been rolled away, but that they might behold the Lord whom they loved restored to their sight once more. And yet these are the very tidings they hear: "He is risen;" the grave no longer contains His risen body; He is not here. Satisfy your own eyes and senses that He has left the tomb—behold the place where they laid Him, but where He no longer lies; He goeth before you into Galilee, there shall ye see Him. And yet even these glad tidings of great joy were announced to incredulous ears and disbelieving

though loving, hearts. But let us do them justice; their unbelief was but for a moment, and even their slowness of belief is to us a confirmation of the truth, overruled and designed of God for a stronger attestation to all who should hereafter believe on Jesus through their word. And when they did admit, and received into their hearts the joyous truth, that their crucified Lord was their risen Lord, with what tenacity did they cleave to it! "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us." No perils could daunt, no difficulties retard, no persecutions prevent. Endowed with the utmost amplitude of commission, and endued with the fullest powers to authenticate their mission, they were to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. And in all probability they did this to the fullest extent of the then known world, though their missionary labours, like those of many a later fellow-labourer, are hid with Christ in God, to be revealed and published "in that day." If we can trust tradition as regards the labours of these early missionaries in the cause of Christ, their sound must, indeed, have gone to the uttermost parts of the earth. If Bartholomew and Thomas preached the gospel in Persia, Armenia, and in India,—if Matthew *and Simon* visited Ethiopia, Libya, and Egypt

—if Andrew extended his journeys into Scythia, and the remoter regions of that rude clime,—and if, above all, there be truth in the record, as I believe there is, that even our own distant and darkened island was visited by Paul,—we may well say, that "their line went out through all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world." And it is so at this present day. The Church of Christ is essentially and vitally a missionary Church, and as she has been faithful or unfaithful to her Lord's commission, she has herself been in light or in darkness, has flourished or decayed. And so it will be to the end; the commission is still in force: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;" nor will it be annulled till the Father's gift to His Son shall be completed in all its fulness, and He has "the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession."

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PREFACE.

It is with no presumptuous purpose to depreciate or supersede the labours of others in the same field, that I am induced to publish the present Commentary on the Gospels. It might, indeed, be sufficient to say, that the mine, or the stream, or the mountain-side, or wherever the ore may be found, is ample enough to admit, and rich enough to reward, the labours of each that digs. But I would simply state my own feelings on the subject, and what it was which first led to the present work.

Having been, for many years, in the habit of reading expositions of Scripture in my domestic worship, I had soon exhausted the few volumes adapted for that purpose which I possessed, and was then induced to make trial of original exposition. Indeed, even at an earlier period, I had often been forced to blend the two. So many circumstances arose amid the various exigencies and events of a somewhat large and promiscuous household, requiring, or at least seeming to call forth, a peculiar notice, either for warning or encouragement—to build up, or, it may have been, even to lay the foundation—that I had soon found that no Commentary, however ample or however excellent, could meet all the varying phases and requirements of an ever-changing family circle. I therefore had recourse at last to reliance on my own resources; and though, in many a particular, I could not but be conscious of the inferiority, yet, upon the whole, I found it more useful, and far more easy, in that way to give to each his due portion of meat in his season. I had in this way gone through the whole of the New Testament; and then, after some interval of other portions of Scripture, I again, a few months ago, resumed the Gospels. It then occurred to me to gather up, as it were, on the following morning, as accurately as I could remember, the crumbs I had scattered the preceding night. This I continued to do without any reference to or idea

of publication, till they began to accumulate on my hands, and it the suggested itself to me, that that which I felt and knew had, throug the blessing of God, been useful to some, might, through the sam blessing, be beneficial and acceptable to others.

I am, at the same time, quite aware, that neither this Commentary nor, in fact, any, can supply the deficiencies I felt in my own house hold, and which each one, no doubt, equally feels in his. It is the sam with prayer: no form of prayer, however excellent, can meet all th requirements of a family congregation. The want of to-day is perhap supplied by the gift of to-morrow, and succeeded by another want c another character: the health of to-day may give way to the sickne of to-morrow, or the sickness be replaced by health; the departure c a member of the household on a journey may call for especial praye for protection, or the return in safety for especial thanksgiving. Th inadvertence or thoughtlessness of the younger, and the deliberat transgression of the older member, demand different language; an no source but the gushing out of the feeling from the heart at th moment of need, is adequate to supply all this. And yet there are s many wants in common, so many infirmities, trials, and afflictio shared alike, and "accomplished in our brethren that are in th world," that there are but few forms in which we cannot find muc adapted to our own case, and our own household. And so with rega to Expositions of Scripture, there are few which, if they simply an unreservedly set forth the truth as it is in Jesus, may not be use with benefit in every family circle. The present one puts forth r claims to originality of design or comment: it is literally the gathe ing up of what was actually delivered in a household, as far as memo could supply, with, of course, the necessary omission of merely pe sonal or local observations. It is very possible that in the address the moment, I may have adopted, unawares, the thoughts or even t words of a predecessor; and even where memory has conscious supplied a more powerful or happier expression than my own, I ha not hesitated to appropriate it, though, of course, with acknowled ments of the debt.

Should it be found that the present volumes are an acceptab addition to the household requirements of family devotion, they w be followed by the remaining Gospels. In committing the prese portion to the press, I commend it, in earnest prayer, to the gre Head of the Church; and, in the words of a holy man of old, I wo say, "Domine Deus, quæcunque dixi de tuo, agnoscant et tui; si q de meo, et tu ignosce et tui."—*August. De Trin.*

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